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CONTENTS

		PAGE
1.	Get at the Kernel	1
2.	Approaches to the Gita	4
3.	Test of True Belief	9
4.	Scoffers also Welcome	13
5.	Atheism only Skin Deep	16
6.	What is Gita?	18
7.	Teacher and Disciple	22
8.	One-Word Commentary	26
9.	Take a Purgative	30
10.	What is not in the Gita	33
11.	Why Study the Gita?	35
12.	Why 700?	39
13.	Yogi Bhava	43
14.	Spoke these Words in Sorrow	47
15.	'I desire no Victory'	51
16.	'Arise, Scorcher of Foes'	55
17.	'Thou should not Grieve'	63
18.	'Thou wilt break through the Bonds of Action'	70
19.	Rise above the Three Gunas	75
20.	'For work alone you have the Right' ...	80
21.	This is a Divine State	85
22.	To Work is Better than Shirking ...	90
23.	Kill the Enemy Desire	97
24.	I am Born from Age to Age	102
25.	What is 'Action' and What is 'Inaction' ...	110
26.	The Man of Faith attains Kn...	...
27.	'He is ever Free'	...
28.	Therefore so Thou...	...
29.	Like Pearls st...	...

...en established in the vici-
...eity of the shrine is Nataraja or
...osture. The image is taken out and
...d ceremonies six times a year.

PAGE

30. Remember Me Alone Always ... 132
31. Do Everything as an Offering unto Me ... 136
32. Thou art the Supreme 140
33. Be Thou merely an Instrument ... 142
34. 'Exceedingly Dear to Me are the True Devotees' 145
35. He is the True Seer who Sees the Supreme Lord in Everything 147
36. Transcending the Gunas He enjoys Immortality 150
37. 'All Vedas indicate Me Alone' ... 152
38. Godly (Virtuous) Activity Liberates, Demonical Enslaves 154
39. Three-fold are They 157
40. Not to be Shirked; to be Performed ... 159
41. Concentrate Your Mind on Me Alone ... 163
42. Take Shelter in Me Alone 167
43. The Act of Self-Surrender—Review ... 172
44. Gita Commandments 175

Postscript to Letter No. 13 179

Appendix—Gita and Non-Violence ... 181

Appendix A

45. A Covenant ... 184-a
46. Gita Essence ... 184-c
47. Go Ahead ... 184-e
48. The Gita Way ... 184-
49. The New S. L. C. ... 184-n
... 184-p
... ... 185
... ... 191

1. GET AT THE KERNEL

My dear Jaya,

So glad to know you wish to study the Gita. You want me to give you all possible help. But to what extent you will be benefited by my suggestions depends entirely upon yourself. I do not at all wish that you should accept anything because I say it. If you do so, you will be committing the same blunder as those who accept some great Acharya or commentator as their guide instead of thinking for themselves. As a consequence many simple and precious things are lost sight of.

You have visited Chidambaram.[1] The beautiful image of Nataraja must have impressed you very much; but unless you see the image on any one of the six days of *abhishekam* in the year, you have not seen the real Nataraja. On other days the image has a big *kirita* (crown) and *kavacha* (covering) for the body: even the foot is covered. Over this are the silks and countless jewels of various precious stones, literally covering every inch of the image. Then again, you have garlands of all sorts and hues and a special one for the feet. Strictly speaking, you do not see the image at all, but only the dress and ornaments. These no doubt add to the beauty and may attract, or even charm, the worshippers. But when you see the Nataraja on the *abhishekam* day (stripped of all *kavachams*, jewels and garlands) you have before you the high watermark of the religious

[1] Chidambaram is a famous shrine in South India. In recent years the Annamalai University has been established in the vicinity of the town. The presiding deity of the shrine is Nataraja or Siva in the famous dancing posture. The image is taken out and bathed with due rites and ceremonies six times a year.

art of our motherland. The image is so full of life and sweetness. You can scarcely resist the temptation to go and embrace Nataraja. It is impossible to take your eyes away from the image even as you leave the shrine.

Something like this has happened to the Gita. Countless commentaries, Tikas and Dipikas, whatever beauties they may bring out, *conceal, rather than reveal,* the true Gita. If you wish to have an idea of the real Gita, you should first of all study it without consulting any commentary. If possible, manage to forget all the things you have heard from various scholars in the Gita lectures of your University.

You have studied the life of Sri Ramakrishna and his sayings. You do not require a commentary to understand them. You understand them in your own way. Is it not so? Why not do the same thing with regard to the Gita? The Sanskrit text and the peculiarity of the language, which lends itself to diametrically opposite meanings and interpretations of the same term, no doubt present a real difficulty. You had better rely on your commonsense and take the most natural and straightforward meaning. I wish to add another word of caution.

In our college days we had a paper on English Literature for the degree examination. Questions were asked about any author or book throughout the whole range of English Literature beginning from the Scandinavian Sagas and Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (I have forgotten the dates of these and their chronology) up to the latest novel. We were not expected to write answers from personal knowledge or first-hand impressions of the books or authors. Even the professors who used to dictate notes (respectfully called 'Lectures') themselves might not have read the books! This farce had a very healthy reaction on me. From that time onwards strings

of words, however sententious or ornate, do not mean anything to me. Nor am I browbeaten by them. From whatever source the words come, I insist on their conveying some tangible meaning. You have heard persons talking to you about Supramental Reality, Spiritual Chemistry, Esoteric Psychology or Cosmic Biology and so on. For me these terms convey no sense or meaning. In these days printed words and scientific terms have taken the place of old superstitions and are swallowed without salt. Therefore you must insist on every word conveying to you some real meaning. With this caution before you, you can hope to get at some truths of the Gita.

You wish that these letters should be written in easy and simple language. I appreciate also your desire to avoid all reference to and discussions of abstruse metaphysics and philosophical jargon. The Gita, however, contains many philosophical and religious ideas. It is impossible to avoid them altogether. You must try to understand them in your own way. It will be very easy for you as you have read Sri Ramakrishna. My outlook on the world and the various problems of life is based upon Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. Therefore you will find in my interpretations of the Gita, Sri Ramakrishna is the only help, light and basis. For is he not a glorious living example of all true philosophy and religion?

This letter is sufficiently long and we shall consider the various approaches to the Gita in another.

2. APPROACHES TO THE GITA

People take to the study of the Gita for various considerations. Some are happily endowed with a simple child-like faith that the Gita contains the actual utterances of God Sri Krishna. It is enough for them if they can worship the book or hear the Gita read out. They feel exactly like a pilgrim going to the temple, making the prescribed rounds, offering incense, etc. to the Deity. Both derive the full and glowing satisfaction of having performed a meritorious act. It is its own reward. The worshipper in the temple does not bother (it never enters into his head even) to find out of what metal or combination of metals the image is made, how much it weighs, who the maker is, etc. In the same way, this class of devout people consider the Gita as an image of God. To these the never-ending, subtle, metaphysical problems and controversies which the scholars delight in are non-existent. You may recall the instance of the Sadhu who came to Dakshineswar garden during the life time of Sri Ramakrishna. The Sadhu had a big book tied in silk cloth which he worshipped daily, morning and evening, with great fervour, offering sandal, flowers, incense, etc. He would often burst into tears of joy during worship. Sri Ramakrishna naturally wanted to find out the contents of the book and requested the Sadhu to show it to him. The Sadhu readily consented and handed the big volume to him. To the utter surprise of Sri Ramakrishna page after page was filled with 'OM RAM' written in big letters. When asked for the reason the devotee explained that if one realizes God, the essence and goal of all knowledge is reached. So he was more than satisfied with his chosen deity's name and worshipped the book containing that name. The name and the

God signified by that name were to him identical. Blessed indeed are they who are endowed with such true and living faith! They have crossed the ocean of doubt. Bliss and peace that passeth all understanding are theirs already.

Another class of people regard the whole Gita as a *malamantra*. *Mala* and *mantra* are technical terms with regard to the sacred names. These details you may find in all Tantric works. If any suitable opportunity arises in the future, I shall try to explain them in detail. It is believed that any mantra bears fruit by constant repetition according to the rules prescribed. Perhaps you have the Gorakhpur or some other edition of the Gita, printed in bold letters. Almost every such edition contains as a Preface, Gita *parayanakrama*, or rules for chanting. These include Anganyasa, Karanyasa, Hridayanyasa, Bijam, Sakti Devata and Dhyana. The Deity or Devata has to be meditated upon according to the Dhyana slokas. There are eight or nine verses given for this purpose. There is enough merit in the chanting or repetition of the Gita in this fashion. I know several persons who do this chanting regularly. They do not pay much heed to the meaning and various interpretations of the verses. The verses are regarded as mantras and mere repetition is more than enough. Perhaps in this age of science such persons are not only rare but are likely to meet with ridicule from your fellow-students. You might have seen in our Asram when the Gita, Chandi or Bhagavatam is being expounded, the devotees would not only go to the shrine to make pranams before they take their seats but also offer prostrations to the reader and the book. You might have read in the life of Sri Ramakrishna that he had a vision of Bhagavan, Bhagavata and the Bhakta all enveloped in one and the same

luminosity, which revelation he often used to stress in the saying that Bhakta, Bhagavan and Bhagavata are identical. It is this belief which inspires the first two classes of people who approach the Gita in a spirit of worship.

Another class study the Gita to understand its teaching and apply them in their daily life and conduct. These also have some sort of faith. But doubts assail them. As their main approach is through the intellect, often the result is very poor. We cannot escape the intellect altogether. Reason is the distinguishing mark of the human being. The classic example in the logic text-book is: 'Man is a rational animal.' But the intellect has very strict limitations. The intellect, like a hungry and voracious animal, pounces upon everything that comes its way and tries to swallow it. Often it can hardly digest and assimilate the many things that it gobbles. This indigestion produces all sorts of idiosyncrasies, obsessions and prejudices. But, alas! if mere intellectual comprehension were sufficient or even effective to any extent, then all the degree-holders, pandits and scholars would have become sages and saints. But why is this not the case? If the motive power and energy needed to carry out some ideas into action is represented by 100 units, intellect is only one unit. The rest must come from Intuition, Will and Emotion. '*Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara*' is a maxim repeated by people on many occasions. You cannot imagine a more simple, true and sublime text than this. Yet how few of us can say with honesty and sincerity that we practise this every day and on every occasion! Surely, it is not due to want of intellectual comprehension of the meaning or import of these texts. We fail to put them into practice because other forces such as Selfishness, Vanity, Fear, Ambition,

Jealousy, Anger, Lust come into play and sweep us off our feet, away from the straight path of Duty, Virtue, and Truth.

This is not the intellect's only limitation. It has a powerful tendency to mislead us and play tricks. A clever lawyer who has taken up a false brief twists rules and texts to prove his case. In like manner the intellect, in very subtle ways, tries to make a black thing appear white. It conceals and covers up our true motives. Sometimes it makes even a thoroughly immoral and diabolical act appear as justifiable and imperative as a sacred duty. In such instances the intellect is briefed and heavily bribed, so to say, by our passions, the classical six enemies (*Shad-ripu*). It will argue, as any lawyer would, for the plaintiff or the defendant, as the circumstances demand or dictate. We must learn to keep this clever servant under control. It is a double-edged weapon: great skill and caution are necessary in handling it. We are safe only when our mind is purged and purified of all passions.

Yet another class of persons are those who want to make use of the Gita as a support for their pet philosophical or sectarian views and convictions. Once they approach the Gita from this angle of vision, they become partisans or even bigots. In their zeal they begin to pervert and twist the texts to serve their own ends. There is a classic name for this—text-torturing. I hope and pray that you will never fall into this trap. How broad, universal and accommodating to every temperament is the Gita will be the burden of all my letters. It is just for this reason that I warned you from borrowing any guide in the shape of commentaries. It is much better to rely on your own commonsense. To search in the pages of the Gita for any particular system of thought

or philosophy is to miss the main truths altogether. You recall the case of the two friends who went to the mango grove in the parable of Sri Ramakrishna? The clever friend spent all the time in filling his note-book with various details and descriptions of the mango trees, their varieties, and all sorts of similar things. The simple friend went to the gardener, got permission to eat the mangoes and tasted every variety to his complete satisfaction. If we read and analyse the Gita only to find out the metaphysical or philosophical teaching, we shall be committing the same blunder, of counting the mango leaves instead of eating the fruit, as the learned friend in the parable. Sri Ramakrishna would often repeat: 'You have come to eat the mango fruits. Eat them first and do not fritter away your energy in counting the leaves.' The central teaching of the Gita is the mango fruit.

I must confess that I feel actual pain and indignation when people quote the Gita to justify the war and enlist volunteers. On various political platforms it is the fashion to quote: *hato vā prāpsyasi swargam*, to excite and inflame the passions of young people. This is a very vulgar and sinful form of exploitation and I consider it a prostitution of the Gita.

The right approach is to *keep a perfectly open mind* in order to understand the Lord's teachings *in their broad sense* and try *to live up to them* to the best of our ability.

3. TEST OF TRUE BELIEF

You say that most of the students have no belief in God, neither are they interested in Religion. This is a complaint which I hear often from old people as well. There is some confusion of thought, I am afraid. I have heard students, boys as well as girls, declaring: 'Tennis is my religion or Cricket is my God.' What he or she ought to say is this: 'Religion or God has a supreme value and all other interests in life must be subordinate to it. One ought to be prepared to sacrifice every thing for its sake. If there is a choice or alternative, a person would unhesitatingly throw in his lot for his God or Religion and not for any other thing.' But, most unfortunately, neither the new votaries of modern Gods nor the old ones of the orthodox type really mean and perform what they profess. You and I believe in God, at least we think we do. Have we any correct or adequate idea of God? Though I am old I cannot answer this question quite satisfactorily. Ideas of God are not the same with every one. Many regard him as a tyrant, an autocrat, a magistrate or a vain person, to be won over by flattery. Some others regard him as the God of justice, mercy, goodness and love. Swami Vivekananda says: 'A buffalo will conceive God as a big buffalo.' Man makes his God after his own fashion. Some wags declare God to be the noblest creation of man.

Whatever be our idea of God what matters is how it affects our daily life and conduct. Is it a live issue or a mere conventional and formal Sunday affair? Judged by this standard very few in the world could strictly be called religious or believers in God. You have in several letters ridiculed the orthodox people. You point out the wide gulf betwixt their profession and practice. You

wax indignant over the glaring incongruities noticeable in our temple, its squalor and dirt, the stout priests itching for money-offerings, etc. You think that there is nothing but fear or blind worship of tradition in all rituals and ceremonies. I can add many more charges against the old and orthodox, but you moderns are no better. Perhaps you are worse. You ridicule image worship. You are equally blind and rank idolators. The difference comes only in the images or idols you worship. Some years ago while I was in Nagpur, the M. C. C. played a match there. It was a hot summer month. Like blind idolators our cricket enthusiasts follow the Western habit of playing cricket between 11 and 5, ignoring the patent fact that our country is in the torrid zone. What is good and convenient for milder climates does not suit us. Special trains brought hundreds of visitors to Nagpur to witness the match. There was a scramble, even scuffles, for tickets. Imagine hundreds of boys and girls paying five or ten rupees for a ticket and standing in the hot sun from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Take it from me, several of them got either a headache or a cold or influenza. Almost at the same time, there was an inter-university debate on 'The necessity of God' and by a small majority of votes the advocates of God were defeated. During this debate, student after student poured ridicule on the heads of the so-called orthodox for the waste of money on pilgrimages, worship in temples and rituals. I was amused to hear these charges and afterwards told some of the students that they only illustrated the saying: 'My doxy is orthodoxy.' These youths who came from outlying districts, spending not theirs but their parents' hard-earned money, to witness the M. C. C. match, standing in the hot sun and getting ill, were in the right. Only the old

folks were wrong in spending money on their pilgrimages.

I am fond of saying that the young folk today have their own Trinity, before which they often kneel down and burn incense exactly as the old orthodox do before Brahma, Vishnu or Siva. Your modern Trinity is Science, Sports and Socialism. I do not object to any Trinity. Let Cricket and Tennis be your God and Socialism your creed. But you should not simply note the mote in others' eyes, ignoring the beam in your own. Now take Socialism. No youth of today will declare his disbelief in this religion or sacred creed. But what he does, if he does anything at all beyond mere lip-service or profession, is to apply to his own benefit and advantage the famous Socialist slogan, 'No one shall have cakes until all have bread.' The actual fact is there are some cakes and not enough bread for all. Enough bread is not baked or created by mere wishing or shouting slogans. The Socialist's doctrine only ends in snatching the cake from others who have got it by dint of labour and industry and putting a part into his own mouth and the rest into his own pockets. In the realm of sports how much true sportsmanship is practised I cannot say. What little there is, is vitiated by the ugly canker of provincialism. In the wider field of life, in the affairs of the world, true sportsmanship is the rarest commodity. Even the true scientific spirit is equally rare. You have only to note how you all swallow, without a grain of salt, anything that appears in the newspapers, or what the self-seeking politician or orator says. So you see if the orthodox have their failings and weaknesses, you moderns are no better. You must remember not to throw stones at others when you live in glass houses.

Now let us go back to belief in God or Religion. The test of the pudding is in the eating. This belief and faith is not to be tested by the number of marks you wear on your body, nor the fasts you observe, nor even by the temples you visit and worship in, but by your whole life and conduct. We have a glorious example in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Pointing to the intellectuals, pandits and those who talk glibly about God, Religion and Philosophy, but behave as though these did not exist, he used to remark that these are like the vultures, which, however high they may soar above, have their eyes fixed on the carrion below. Lust and gold (*Kamini-Kanchana*) are the carrion. Even those who are sincere in their own way, he points out, are like flies which sometimes sit on the sweets and sometimes run to sores and filth. But his ideal of a truly religious man or a man of right belief is one who behaves like the honey-bee which will go only to the flower and never to filth. The flower is the lotus feet of the Lord and the filth is worldliness.

Remember the story of the thief lying in a room adjoining one containing immense treasures? By a little opening in the wall he could possess all. Ramakrishna asks: 'Will he be able to sleep? Will not his whole mind and thought indeed be directed towards making the necessary hole and taking possession of the treasures?' He points out that God is such a precious treasure. If we really seek Him and believe in Him, we would be straining every nerve to find Him first and foremost and not waste our energies in mad pursuit of this or that worldly ambition. How many of us can truly say that our belief in God and Religion measures up to this standard? How many of us act as Sri Ramakrishna did from his early life to the end of his days? 'If learning, riches, possessions, name and fame will not help me to realize

God,' he argued, 'I won't waste even a single moment of my precious life to gain these. I will struggle ceaselessly to realize God. Knowing Him, everything is known. Gaining Him, no other thing is wanted.' This is the true test of belief in God and Religion.

4. SCOFFERS ALSO WELCOME

In my last letter I wrote to you what true belief in God or Religion means. Many who have got a modern outlook do not honestly feel that there is any real need for believing in God. I might confess that during my college days I felt no need for God. But the hard realities of life, experiences which cannot be explained away and other factors have contributed to the change in my outlook on life. When my elders poured ridicule or showered abuse on me for my frankness in avowing my disbelief, I used to feel that God, if He were worthy of that exalted name, would certainly know and appreciate my honesty and sincerity and sympathize with me in my difficulties. So, you need not think that your friends who openly declare themselves atheists are in anyway unfortunate or lost. Nor need you take any pride in your own belief and faith in God. Just as you cannot change the colour of your skin or your stature, you cannot very materially alter, except within well-defined limits, the constitution or general make-up of your mind. In other words, everybody grows according to his own innate nature. The mind is the cumulative product of one's own actions and experiences in life. This need not be of one life only: it may be (as we believe) of so many previous lives as well. We should not, therefore, look for uniformity of conduct and outlook in persons.

But what we have a right to demand from every one is that there should be no gulf between profession and practice. Sri Ramakrishna used to describe this as *'Bhvair ghare chure na hai.'*

A friend of yours is frank enough to admit (for example) that she does not feel like praying to God, nor is even sure of His existence. You must sympathize with her and understand the why and wherefore of her outlook. If she is sincere and honestly tries to put into practice what she believes, then you must respect her and give her a place in your heart as you would to another who prays and worships God.

The problem in your friend's case must be approached in this way: Quite independent of our belief in God, there exist, beyond question, our mind and body and the laws governing them. If you are ignorant of the laws and violate any one of them, you must pay the penalty and reap the consequences. How often do we not find people recklessly running after the various pleasures of life and coming to utter ruin? Even a single careless thought or act might perhaps mar your whole life. What seems for the moment a thoughtless deed changes the entire future, for instance taking to drink. No sermons are necessary to emphasize this. But when we realize the exacting and inexorable laws of mind and body, we cannot take too much care in cultivating them in the right way. If we do not pay heed to these, we shall be committing a tragic blunder. Mind and body are two of our most precious assets or possessions. Success or failure in life is determined by the use we make of them. Many persons do not believe in anything beyond mind and body. Even such people may study the Gita with profit. The Gita, like a good and loving parent, points out to us the snares and pitfalls in our

No. 928
Date 16-1-59

path and warns us of the dangers ahead. It is ready to take hold of one's hand and lead one along the right royal road. How can we reject such a guide if we are mindful of our true interests? As we shall presently see, it does not play the role of a schoolmaster and say: 'Take down what I say or stand up on the bench!' Neither does it threaten you with hell-fire as penalty for disregard of its teachings. It presents the problem in a broad and truly scientific spirit. It puts before us all the pros and cons and gives us full liberty to choose what we like. See Chapter XVIII, 63.

> 'Thus has knowledge, more secret than secrecy itself, been imparted to you by me. Having considered this from all points of view do as you like.'

The Gita is looked upon as a scripture. You need not be frightened at the word 'scripture'. Every religion has its own scriptures. They are not mere codes or regulations made by the whims or fancies of their founders. Nor are they like an act of legislature passed by the majority of elected members. They are somewhat like caution signals on the road based on the actual experiences or realizations of disinterested persons. They are the precious heritage given to humanity for their welfare and benefit. They are to be read as rules of conduct. It is not so much the form or the letter but the spirit which should inspire and guide our conduct. No one can reasonably take exception because they are given as rules. Even in sports there are certain rules of the game which you must observe and respect. More so in the vital game of life. You must regulate your life by wise laws rooted in the nature of our mind and body. The study of the Gita need not, therefore, be restricted merely to those who profess some particular religion or belief in some God or other. It is meant for all who

wish to play their part in life with some amount of sanity, simplicity and sincerity.

5. ATHEISM ONLY SKIN DEEP

Our elders often complain that students profess atheism and manifest a spirit of revolt against all restrictions. This does not worry me at all. It is merely a passing phase of youth full of abundant animal spirits and denotes only inexperience of life. Often students overdo things. I have seen many who would ridicule orthodox people and speak irreverently about God but act quite differently during the time of examinations. Lest others should catch them red-handed and tease them they go to the temple secretly to pray for success in their examination. Often these scoffers are led by the false idea that a show of atheism betokens bravery and independence of thought and spirit. It is sometimes due to what a modern psycho-analyst would call contra-suggestibility or exhibitionism.

Two very curious instances come to my memory. Once there was too much salt in the 'Pakodi' served for tiffin in our hostel. As the students took a bite, they began to shower abuse on the cook. Some fellows started a complaint that the tea was just water. The whole lot of them left the tiffin untouched, washed their hands with the tea and marched off. They went to the nearest restaurant and took revenge by eating all sort of costly dishes. They simply made fools of themselves by spending extra money and shouting at things that could not be remedied. This instance is typical of the irresponsible atmosphere in which students live and grow. Another instance is rather more serious. In our college

days, a girl in Calcutta, Snehalata by name, burnt herself to death because her parents had to mortgage their dwelling house to find the dowry for her marriage. Several sentimental girls followed this example. A good many leagues were formed by college youths with the sole object of fighting the curse of the dowry system. Several took solemn pledges that they would not be a party to it and degrade themselves to the level of brutes. They proclaimed that the dowry system was tantamount to selling boys, like bulls, for a price. I do not think that even one per cent of these pledges were honoured.

The fact is, students live in an unreal world of novels, dramas, poetry and fancy and often develop a sort of theatricality in themselves. When they come out of the university, they meet dull prosaic life. Hard realities sober them down. We have to thank God that they do not turn out misanthropes, pessimists and cynics.

The right corrective is a proper home and school atmosphere. Unfortunately, modern homes do not radiate any healthy influence as of old. The parents themselves lack the necessary training. Various festivals and pujahs throughout the seasons of the year, the daily worship at home, the chanting of stotras by members of the family —these exercised a most salutary influence on growing minds. Nowadays in some modern families both parents are at their clubs till late in the night. Daily worship is almost unknown. Festivals are not observed at all. Young folks have for their companions only the servants. From such homes the students go to the irresponsible life of a hostel. Add to this the fever of political excitement, the literature on Bolshevism and other similar explosive thought and outlook. An earnest study of the Gita would do much to counteract the baneful influence of such an unfortunate environment.

6. WHAT IS GITA?

You have heard of the Mahabharata. No Hindu child is ignorant of the thrilling stories of Sita, Savitri, Draupadi and Damayanti. I say thrilling because in childhood we delight in action, strife, and in all that gives us an idea of grandeur and power. The Mahabharata is full of such stories and episodes. In remote villages illiterate peasants (men and women) gather on moonlight nights in the courtyard of a temple and spend the greater part of the night listening with rapt attention to recitals of the Mahabharata or Ramayana. Most of the modern students lose much real joy and valuable education as they are strangers to such rural life and experience.

The Mahabharata is considered the fifth Veda. It is a voluminous work containing over a hundred thousand verses. In this vast ocean the Bhagavad Gita stands out like a most attractive and fascinating island. The pilgrims that wend their way to this paradise can be counted in millions. This pilgrimage has been going on for ages and will surely continue as long as humanity has any fascination for culture and the spiritual life. I need not tell you the incidents and causes that led to the fratricidal war between the Pandavas and their Kaurava cousins. You must read the Mahabharata yourself, if you want to go back to the times of Draupadi and catch the colour and sound of that age. It is enough for my purpose to take you on the wings of imagination to the actual battle-field of Kurukshetra. Another interesting fact about the Gita is that it is reported by Sanjaya to the blind king Dhritarashtra sitting in his palace far away from the scene of action. You are all familiar nowadays with the radio commentaries on matches,

races, etc. I have seen old people sitting at the radio for hours and enjoying like little children and shouting out as if they were witnessing the races before their very eyes. You must have listened to Talyarkhan's commentaries from the Bombay station of All-India Radio. To speak in modern terminology Sanjaya is just a Talyarkhan. This is how the Mahabharata describes the report of Sanjaya which constitutes the Gita.

Sage Vyasa, the grandsire of the Pandavas and Kauravas, paid a visit to Dhritarashtra on the eve of the battle. He wanted to give him the boon of 'television' if he desired to witness the incidents of the battle. The blind old king was unwilling to witness his own sons and relatives being killed, but prayed that he might get regular news of the happenings. Sri Vyasa conferred clairvoyance, clairaudience and other supernatural powers upon Sanjaya. According to the story, Sanjaya is the reporter of the entire Gita to Dhritarashtra. When conferring the boon Sage Vyasa said he would witness all the happenings of the world and understand both the spoken word and hidden thoughts. Further, nothing in the world, day or night, distance or barrier, would limit his capacity of knowing and understanding. No weapons would harm him, nor would he be subject to exhaustion.

Another feature of the Gita is that the long discourse running into 700 verses purports to be the actual conversation between Lord Sri Krishna and his companion Arjuna seated in his war chariot in the midst of the opposing armies about to begin battle. All these historical incidents have given rise to a lot of controversy and speculation. How much of truth is there in the story of the Mahabharata? Is the battle-field a fitting place for a philosophical discourse? Are Arjuna and Krishna historical personages? Are not all these things poetic

fancy or pure fiction inserted in the Mahabharata later on by some clever person? Such doubts and controversies have given rise to the following explanation, namely, the war, etc. are not physical or historical events but an allegory. The battle-field, Kurukshetra, is the heart of man. The Pandavas and Kauravas represent the good and evil forces perpetually striving to destroy each other. Arjuna is only the personification of the good and virtuous elements in man seeking the aid of God. Taking shelter under His holy feet one finally comes out victorious by His grace. This interpretation is in perfect accord with Hindu faith. The Puranas and the earlier scriptures like the Upanishads abound in such allegoric representations or descriptions of the play of the inner human and cosmic forces.

What is the exact significance of any historical event which is accepted as beyond doubt? Take the case of Lord Buddha. No scholar or orientalist has till now questioned the historicity of Gautama the Sakyamuni. Two thousand five hundred years ago he was born in Kapilavastu. After eighty years and more of splendid service to humanity by his noble life and sublime teachings, he departed from the face of the earth. Whether or not he actually lived for that brief span does not affect us very materially. How he lived, what he taught, how his teachings and utterances resulted in a huge organization, how it functioned for thousands of years and conveyed the spiritual culture and precious message to every corner of the globe, how kings after kings vied with one another in sending huge expeditionary forces, not to kill, annex or subjugate other people or races, but to help, serve and uplift humanity living in darkness and superstition by carrying a message of Hope, Peace, Goodwill and Deliverance—all these are matters that

ought to interest us. This is really the counterpart of the historical bit, viz. Buddha's birth and earthly career. I call this the eternal aspect for two reasons. First, the effect continues and will continue for ages to come. Secondly, even his very advent is the outcome of an eternal law and in virtue of this self-same eternal law, nature or truth, many Buddhas have come before and many more under different names are bound to come in the future as well.

You and I are no doubt historical persons. But we were not existent before a point of time and will not be after some definite time. May this be as long as possible in your case! Nevertheless, our coming into existence, our doing the various things we actually happen to perform are all results of the workings of an eternal principle or law or form of which we are but individual instances. What matters to us as individuals is no doubt the historical aspect. All the same the eternal is the warp and woof of our being and that alone endures and matters. Whether Arjuna and Sri Krishna actually sat in the chariot on the battle-field of Kurukshetra and spoke all that is reported in the Gita may or may not be true as a historical phenomenon, but in its eternal aspect you and I and all humanity are Arjunas. We need, and very badly need, the help and inspiration of the Lord Sri Krishna, the charioteer, to steer us in this terrible battle of our lives and lead us safe to a glorious victory. As I understand it, the Gita can give every possible help to us in our onward march to reach the highest and become perfect, as Christ would say, 'Even as your Father in heaven is perfect.' Some of the preliminary conditions for seeking this aid and benefiting by it, I have already indicated in my former letters. Something more is necessary to complete this initial equipment.

7. TEACHER AND DISCIPLE

Hindu culture is a spiritual treasure accumulated during thousands of years. How this has been preserved intact is a marvel. This miracle has been achieved by the most sublime or sacred relationship between the teacher and the disciple. In popular conception the initiation or the giving of the mantra (or the sacred syllables) is considered a secret. In fact, it is too sacred but not too much of a secret. Perhaps the sacred symbols or mantras are very simple common names and sounds. They are too sacred to be uttered openly. They are only whispered into the disciple's ear.

Your professors give out very informing and valuable facts. Some scholars like your Vice-Chancellor may discourse on the Upanishads and the Gita in an inspiring manner. These do not constitute *Upadesam* or initiation by a Guru of a disciple. It ought to be, you may protest. But it is not treated as such on either side. The Guru may appear to be a very ordinary or even ignorant person according to your University standards. Yet from him and through him alone the spiritual tradition is handed down from generation to generation. Even if a disciple is learned and holds an eminent position, and commands honour and respect in the country, he must sit at the feet of his Guru and receive spiritual guidance. You will find in Sri Ramakrishna this tradition is revived, respected and restored to its original significance. He was a fully realized man. He had already gained the summit of the spiritual quest. Yet, when he began to practise a particular mode of discipline or Sadhana, he would approach a Guru and receive initiation with due respect and formalities. Later on we find him helping the gurus themselves in getting rid of their imperfections!

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We can see in Sri Ramakrishna the ideal of both the teacher and the disciple. As a teacher his one concern is the welfare of the disciples. He loves them with an intensity unknown in any ordinary worldly human relationship or affection. He suffers physical torture and mental agony for a sight of his disciples. He does not also scruple to reprimand, correct and even deliver hard blows to destroy their egoism or weakness of any kind. In a word, he cared more for his disciple's welfare than the disciples themselves. This is unparalleled in human relationship. Many extraordinary instances of this peculiar relationship are to be found in his behaviour with Naren and other disciples. His contact with his disciples is imbued with spirituality pure and simple. But at the least trace of worldliness, his mind would recoil even from his most favourite disciple. Such extraordinary or superhuman unselfish, disinterested love for the disciple is embodied only in the ideal teacher. Therefore the Guru is not a mere human being, but a veritable image of God Himself. 'The Guru (spiritual teacher) is Brahma, the Guru is Krishna, the Guru is the Lord Siva, the Guru is verily the Supreme Brahman. Salutations to that Guru.'

All divine honour or homage is offered to him. There is nothing a disciple could give or do to the Guru that could be considered too high or too much. Menial service, partaking of the leavings from the Guru's plate as consecrated food or *prasādam*, the observance of fast and pollution on the passing away of the Guru, as enjoined on the death of a parent, are some of the striking aspects of the traditional veneration in which the Guru is held by the disciple. Such abject humility, self-abnegation or surrender (*saraṇāgati*) is a *sine-qua-non* or pre-requisite for the flow of spiritual current or energy

from the teacher to the disciple. It is a psychological process, and when the mind speaks to mind or the heart to heart cold logic and reason must be put away altogether. Reason is the essence of egoism. Spiritual truths are super-realities, matters for one's own actual experience or for the intuition of a purified or exalted mind. Human reason is unable to scale such heights. That is the true explanation for this strange relationship.

Let us examine this from another point of view. 'God is the neuter gender, the Absolute of the philosopher, or the Impersonal-Personal Brahman,' are all to us but phrases and words only. I confess I have never been able to have a clear grasp of these. But God, to be understood and loved, must be conceived in a human form. It is through manifestations in human form or avatars alone that we can form a picture of God and his ways and relationships with men. In the absence of the avatars, which are few and far between, the Guru serves the purpose. Some people say that God is everywhere and manifests Himself in everything. It stands to reason that He must be more manifest in a human being and most so in a spiritual teacher.

Tantras and puranas have evolved a marvellous technique round the Guru-sishya relationship. It has been developed both as an art and a science. During thousands of years from the post-Buddhistic era, the Tantric, Sakta, Pauranik and the Vaishnava cults have been busy in this direction. The literature on the subject would fill a whole library. I suppose you have no ambition to become another Anandamoyee or something of that sort. If you have curiosity enough you may pick up the volume of *Mahanirvana Tantra* translated by Sir John Woodroffe. Similarly, on the Vaishnava side, any book on the Chaitanya cult will give you enough details

on the subject. I must stop lest this should bore you. But one other aspect must be mentioned. Sri Sankara in his Dakshinamoorthy Stotra says:

Citraṃ vaṭatarôrmūlé vṛddhah śishyā gurūryuvā
Gurôstu maunam vyākhyānam śishyāstu chinnasamśayāh

'Strange, the disciples under the tree were all aged people; the Guru was young: he taught them by keeping silence and the doubts of the disciples were cleared up.'

You see the Guru teaches by silence and the disciples are liberated from all doubts. The Guru is young and the disciples are old. I present this riddle to you. Exercise your ingenuity to solve it. Whatever it is, spiritual truths are communicated not so much by words or lectures but by communion of spirit with spirit in calm and deep silence.

In these days of advertisement nobody need seek anything. Insurance agents come to you and show remarkable solicitude for the welfare and happiness of your family. Similarly, agents for so many necessary and unnecessary goods. Turn to the column of current engagements in any daily newspaper. You will find scores of lectures on all sorts of subjects and 'all are cordially invited'. This is the modern spirit and outlook. Any person who finds or thinks he has found something very precious gets hold of a millionaire and goes on broadcasting his theory. Our ancestors did not believe in broadcasting, at least so far as spirituality was concerned. They insisted that the disciple or seeker after truth must be keen, eager and anxious to know it. He must be prepared to lay down even his life in his quest. He must have unquestioning faith (*Sraddha*) in his teacher. Only to such may the spiritual truth be communicated.

When you read the Upanishads you will find texts on the point, e.g. Samitpani, etc. in the Mundakopanishad. There is a Sanskrit proverb: 'Do not tell unless eagerly questioned.' Verse 7 of Chapter II in the Gita fulfills this requirement.

Eagerness, if anywhere it could be found, was fully present in Arjuna. He found himself in a tempestuous sea of doubt and despair and on the point of being drowned in it. He has found in Sri Krishna a true friend in need. The perfect and ideal teacher meets a tried and worthy disciple. In the absence of any natural and necessary conditions on both sides, no wonder that Universities are not anything more than factories for turning out degree holders. When you read the Gita please forget that I have written these letters to you, pray and feel the presence of Lord Sri Krishna, to whom alone you can truly say as in the Brapanna Gita:

Tvaméva mātā ca pitā tvaméva tvaméva bandhusca
sakhā tvaméva
Tvaméva vidyā dṛaviṇam tvaméva tvaméva sarvam
mama déva déva

The rest will be smooth sailing. You can go ahead with full steam. Wish you good luck. In the next letter, we shall begin the consideration of the teaching of the Gita.

8. ONE-WORD COMMENTARY

Commentaries on the Gita are innumerable. There are perhaps a hundred or more in the field. They are still being written and will continue to be written. Among all those extant and yet to come, unique and perhaps most wonderful is the commentary consisting

of a single word. Sri Ramakrishna once summed up the teaching of the Gita in this manner: Repeat Gita ten times, you get its essence, *Tyāgī, Tyāgī. Renunciation* is the very essence of this wonderful book. 'O man, renounce everything and worship God.'

Some of our learned countrymen hold the religion of our ancestors responsible for our political downfall. They assert that our religion tends to produce an attitude of 'other-worldliness' and neglect of interest and efficiency in the practical affairs of this world. This is the construction they put on the insistence on Renunciation or *Tyāga* as the *sine-qua-non* for the attainment of *Moksha* or liberation.

Even the Gita has not been spared by this school of thought. We need not take these views seriously, as they are simply an effort to find a scapegoat for our present miserable plight. Blaming somebody, whether in the past or present, does not solve the problem. We must at least try and understand in an impartial spirit what Sri Ramakrishna means when he says that renunciation is the essence of the teaching of the Gita. He does not ask people to be indifferent to worldly or material concerns. Rather he shows them the way to success in life. You may recollect his saying that you must churn the butter and place it in water. Then there is no fear of its being lost. But you cannot treat milk like that. If you are to be in the world you must churn your heart and take the butter of devotion, i.e. fix the mind firmly on the feet of the Lord. You may then plunge into the activities of the world; you will not be caught up or lost in it. He often used to say: 'Tie the knowledge of Adwaita in your apron and do what you like in the world. You will remain free.' Several other sayings of his emphasize this point.

Do your duty in the world like the woman at the husking machine who suckles her baby, chats with her customers and all the time takes care that her hand does not get smashed.

Somehow or other the word Renunciation or *Tyāga* is to the modern mind like a red rag to the bull. It is natural for people in the prime of life to hanker after the joys of the world and the fulfilment of their ambitions and dreams. If they do not exercise proper control over the senses and check their passions and impulses, they will, like the avaricious fly plunging into a pot of honey, get caught in the meshes of the world, nay, they will even die there. If on the other hand, they can sit at the rim of the cup and carefully suck the honey, then they might fare better. But very few exercise this self-restraint. The more control they have the more success and satisfaction they achieve. A painful tragedy in life is the very familiar picture of a promising and talented youth coming to a sudden crash through thoughtlessly rushing after immediate pleasures and enjoyments. Sri Ramakrishna, following the Gita, teaches and insists on the right attitude, right speech, right action and right thought as the prime conditions which alone ensure success in life.

Some clever people, however, argue thus: The mind is everything. If we have devotion and purity of mind, external actions do not matter. Some of my friends used to say: 'Even if I don't go to the temple or observe the prescribed rituals, I love truth, I serve humanity, I do my duty to the best of my ability. What more is needed? I do not want to be like the sanctimonious orthodox who are rank atheists at heart.' If we could keep our minds pure, free, our aims always pitched high, whatever be the outward activity it would be quite right. Is it possible to

do so physically or psychologically? Sri Ramakrishna would reply thus: 'If you eat radish or garlic you will get the smell of it in the breath. If you live near a chimney, however careful you may be, you cannot prevent your dress being stained with soot.' You find in his life this very striking characteristic. If he decides to do something, his body, his whole mind, all his speech, thoughts, feelings, etc. used to move in that direction. He has no patience with those who talk high philosophy and justify their vulgar actions by quoting the example of Janaka. Sri Ramakrishna's life and all his Sadhanas have this important bearing for us. The ideal chosen must be practised in thought, speech and action. It must colour and influence all our life and conduct. If there is even the slightest discrepancy between what we do and what we profess, the Sadhana is not perfect. To achieve this a ceaseless and unflagging struggle must be waged. Strict watch has to be kept on thoughts which spring upon us unawares and lead us astray.

Take for instance the ideal of Bramacharya. Physical continence alone will not do. There should be a good deal of restraint in speech and thought as well. Indulgence in food is not considered to be a sin. But strictly speaking, Bramacharya in the true sense is not possible unless the palate is thoroughly kept under control.

Tāvajjiténdriyônasyād vijitāyéndriyah pamān
Na jayét rasanam yāvajjitam sarvam jité rasé

'A man who has overcome the other organs cannot be a master of his senses until he controls the organ of taste; when the organ of taste is controlled everything is controlled.'

(Uddhava and Sri Krishna, p. 52). Bhagavatam Can. XI sk. 8-21.

It is not merely a negative virtue. If you resolve not to think of any particular object, it is certain that that very thing will force itself on your mind. If true Bramacharya, for example, is to be achieved, the mind should be directed towards and merged in a positive and sublime idea. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, the attainment of this ideal was possible as he always looked upon every woman as a manifestation of the Divine Mother.

The methods of Sadhana pursued may differ according to varying temperaments. But one thing is common to all—not even a trace of egoism or selfishness finds a place in the Sadhaka. His ideal in life is to mould body and mind into perfect instruments in his hands. This is what the Gita means by Renunciation of the fruits of action.

That is the ideal we are all asked to aim at and practise. On reading about the Hindu ideal of widowhood (which is the same as that of a Sannyasin) I was struck with the following verse:

Putravat purusham tulyam

You see now Renunciation or *Tyāga* is not in any sense negative merely. It has a positive aspect also of doing one's duty or meditation upon God without any attachment or expectation of the fruits.

9. TAKE A PURGATIVE

In the very first letter, I suggested that in studying the Gita you should not borrow the views or see through the spectacles of commentators. Every one of us has got likes and dislikes, prejudices and prepossessions which colour our understanding. You are born and

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brought up in the Ramakrishna atmosphere. You, perhaps, have no difficulty in appreciating the celebrations held in honour of Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ. I remember one incident which happened years ago in the Madras Mutt. A good devotee from Ceylon (a Saivaite Tamil) happened to visit Madras after his Arudra Darsan at Chidambaram during the Christmas holidays. He was invited for the Christmas Eve celebration. Our worship of Christ, reading of the Bible burning incense, candles, etc. (quite natural and normal to you) gave him a rude shock. He confessed to me later that he thought we were all committing a sacrilege. Imagine an Arya Samajist coming to the shrine in our Asrama and witnessing our evening *āratrikam*, waving of lights, *chāmaram*, etc. before the statue of Sri Ramakrishna. What do you think his feelings would be? Instances like these could be multiplied or imagined by yourself.

Whenever Ayurvedic physicians and Kavirajas take up a case for treatment, the first thing they do is to administer a good purgative. Allopaths also do the same. Homeopaths give a dose of sulphur to neutralize all previous medicines which they regard as poison. In a similar way you have to take a mental purgative before undertaking your study of the Gita. To the Saivaite, praise of Krishna or his avatar-hood or the suggestion that we should take refuge at His holy feet might offend his peculiar religious susceptibilities. Some of them have gone to the extent of interpreting the Gita as a Saivaite scripture, because Sri Krishna himself says: *Iswarah sarvabhūtānām* (XVIII—61). The attitude of Sri Ramakrishna comes to our help here. He is a Saivaite, Sakta, Vaishnavaite, Christian, Muslim, all in one. Mind you, he is not a mere colourless cosmopolitan or eclectic as some might say, but the staunchest adherent of that point of

view which he follows or observes for the time being. He would insist that even the minutest detail of a particular discipline or system must be observed with meticulous care and faith.

This word 'faith' reminds me I must emphasize another prerequisite. You must approach the Gita with a certain amount of respect and regard. For ages, millions have been regarding it as the word of God. This does not mean that you should blindly or uncritically believe what is written there. You should not also at the same time consider it as merely a piece of ordinary poetry. Scriptures are not intellectual speculation. They are truths realized and revealed to perfectly pure minds. To such purified and exalted souls sublime truths flash spontaneously. Even when we cannot appreciate them fully, we must be modest enough to realize that they need not necessarily be impossible or untrue. In a lake disturbed and agitated, you cannot see your image clearly. In like manner, so long as our minds are disturbed or distracted by passions and desires, we are unable to grasp great truths correctly.

Sri Ramakrishna's pure mind was able to realize the Divine Mother in every woman, even in one considered impure and fallen. Are we in a position to see and feel anything approaching this sublime realization? Nevertheless, Sri Ramakrishna's visions and experiences are true and beyond dispute. Our ideal must be to rise to such a purified state of mind. Even when we fail to do this, we ought to regard such experiences with respect and veneration. A very interesting story is told of Lord Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva). One of his followers, a reputed scholar, in his pride of knowledge, said to the Master that he had proved clearly that the Sridharaswami' Tika of the Bhagavatam was full of defects.

Chaitanya Deva immediately ordered him out of his presence for this irreverence. Sridharaswami deserved every reverence, and even if one differed from him, one had to express oneself in a spirit of humility.

Several modern scholars and critics fail to understand the true and vital import of our scriptures because they have little real respect or regard for them. They do not approach these in a receptive frame of mind. Regardless of chronology and probability, they say the Krishna cult is a mere imitation of Christ. The interpolation theory stands them in good stead whenever inconvenient texts crop up. All that I am driving at comes to this: the Gita is the teaching of Sri Krishna. He is not an ordinary man or a mere scholar. If anything that is taught in the Gita does not appear true or is not quite convincing, we must search within our heart and see if any selfish interests stand in the way.

This means that we should be prepared to accept the truth whatever its consequences. It may be that our entire past life will have to be condemned as wholly wrong, or we may have to abandon all our pet theories and beliefs. We should not flinch from any consequence, if we care for truth alone. This is the essence of the true scientific spirit.

10. WHAT IS NOT IN THE GITA

Faith is neither fashionable nor palatable to the ultra-modern mind. But we dare not refuse to examine things from a scientific point of view. If you study the Gita in such a frame of mind, one good result is bound to follow. You will be quite sure of what is not or cannot find a place in the Gita.

Very often people ask me strange questions. Once on my visit to a Sanskrit college I was asked to address the Pandits and Vidwans under training. You know I am fond of the Gita, and so that was my subject. When I was going to the meeting, a reputed Vaishnava Pandit asked me if Adwaita is taught in the Gita. I replied, 'Certainly.' He further queried, 'Is there no Vishist-adwaita in the Gita?' I promptly replied, 'Undoubtedly, the Gita is full of it.' Then he put another question, 'Is there Dwaita in it?' 'Yes to be sure,' was my answer. You may imagine his wonder and dismay. To these scholars the replies were patently absurd. There are some who claim there is Saivism in the Gita. The Buddhists also claim that it is Buddhistic because the word 'Nirvana' is used in it. Others say there are many 'isms'. One Christian missionary told me he found the Gita full of Christianity. I was naturally curious to know how he had come to this conclusion. He quoted the most famous verse '*Sarvadharmān parityajya ....*' (Chap. XVIII, 66) and added, 'This is exactly Christ's teaching. By faith in Christ alone can salvation be obtained. You say it is Krishna, it is wrong.' Muslims may claim the Gita as their gospel, because 'One God and only one' is taught in the Gita. The Arya Samaj also finds its own point of view embodied in it.

The truth of the matter is all 'isms' so far known to humanity and those that may be discovered in the future find an appropriate place in the Gita. As Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'It is only giving different names to one and the same thing.' There is, however, one thing which is not in the Gita, and could never find a place in it, and it is this: 'This and this alone is right and all else wrong.' You will find again and again the Gita proclaiming that in whatever way men approach God,

knowingly or unknowingly, they all seek Him only. All controversies and abuse of others are the result of trying to read in the Gita what is not in fact there.

You remember Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the dyer. A man kept a solution of a dye in a tub. Many people came to him to have their clothes dyed. He would ask a customer, 'What colour would you like to have your clothes dyed in?' If the customer wanted red, the dyer would dip the cloth in the tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed red.' If another customer wanted his cloth dyed yellow, he would dip the cloth in the same tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed yellow.' If a customer wanted his cloth dyed blue, the man would dip it in the same tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed blue.' Thus he would dye the clothes of his customers in different colours, dipping them all in the same solution. One of the customers watched all this with amazement. The dyer asked him, 'Well, what colour do you want for your cloth?' The customer said, 'Brother, dye my cloth in your own colour.'

So, let us try to read the Gita in its own right colour and spirit, and not seek for our own pet theories.

11. WHY STUDY THE GITA?

You naturally ask, 'Is it absolutely necessary to study the Bhagavadgita or any scripture in order to lead a right life and do our duty in the world? By studying any such scripture does one become *ipso facto* a better person?'

This is the very simple question that arises in the minds of all, especially students. But it is not so easy to answer it satisfactorily. I shall try to tell you how it

strikes me and what I feel about it. Man is defined as a religious animal for he is born in a family in an environment wherein some faith, creed and belief are there ready-made for him, so to say. Naturally, in his childhood and youth, he will have learnt something about these from his parents. The question of disbelief and unbelief comes in only at a later stage when he begins to think for himself. Whether one tries to think about these matters or dismisses them as useless or remains indifferent depends upon a large number of factors.

In the first place, no human being begins his life on a clean slate. Nor is he able to order his life as he pleases. The Hindu culture (accumulated during thousands of years) believes that we begin from where we ended in our previous lives. Although we are not straws in the stream of past Karma, to be carried away by it wherever it pleases, our nature, tastes, outlook, etc. are in a large measure determined by our past. That is why you find among students of the same University, so much variety in appearance, temperament and mental outlook. Right from minor preferences in food and dress up to the most serious concerns in life this variety is striking. There may be all sorts of explanations for this. But our Hindu theory of Karma affords us as much satisfaction as any other. At any rate, until a better and more satisfactory one is forthcoming, this must be accepted as a working hypothesis. A very common mistake made by laymen, scholars and even philosophers is to identify this law of Karma with a fatalistic doctrine which leaves no room for initiative, progress or freedom. This is the view usually held by Christian missionaries. But if one understands the Hindu view correctly, it does not lend itself to any such criticism. Rather as Swami Vivekananda puts it, 'The Karma theory is a declaration of the

freedom of man.' He says, 'I am responsible for the present and I can determine the future. . .'

In philosophy you will come across a high-sounding theme: Free Will *versus* Determinism. Endless controversies have raged over this. Philosophers have not yet reached any satisfactory solution. This need not worry you.

I am sure you recollect Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the cow in the grazing ground tied to a peg by a long rope. Within the range of this rope the cow is perfectly free to roam about as it pleases. Often it foolishly chafes at the bondage and goes round and round the peg. But, in rare instances, the cow pulls strenuously at the peg and escapes to full freedom, rope and all. Our past Karma is just what the rope is to the cow. This parable helps to set at rest all controversy on this question.

It is hardly possible to suggest any single rule of conduct suitable and satisfactory to everybody. Nevertheless, the Gita contains broad, universal and practical hints and suggestions. Any one who is keen and earnest to lead a regulated and purposeful life can find ample light and guidance. The trouble with most of us is that we are content to drift along with the current. We are a bundle of negatives. We imitate now this, now that person, or the current fashion. If we wake up at all we find we are too late. Our human birth is a rare and precious gift or privilege. Nobody can set any limit to the possibilities of progress in any individual. You can become higher than the Gods or descend lower than the beasts.

To become a musician you have to practise strenuously for a number of years. Considerable industry, patience and perseverence are necessary to attain

efficiency in any department of life. Even to produce a good milch cow or a race horse so much care and attention is required. Equally arduous is the task of producing good fruits and flowers. Haphazard cultivation yields very poor results. Speaking of plants, I am reminded of the late Dr Burbank of California, who is usually called the plant wizard. He grafted tomatoes and potatoes so as to make the same plant yield both. He produced a pumpkin larger than a motorcar and achieved many other equally wonderful things in the plant world, to deserve the name Wizard. He wrote a book entitled *The Training of the Human Plant.* The title arrested my attention and I enjoyed reading it. I would advise you also to read it. A perusal of this interesting book will convince you of the supreme importance of care and training in the cultivation of the human mind.

The problem of life is so complex and complicated that without a conscious and continuous effort we shall not be able to make the best use of it. The Gita lays bare the secrets of the human mind and nature. It emphasizes the importance of having a clear idea of our goal and the supreme need for a steady and strenuous effort to attain it. It gives several practical hints to make the path smooth and easy. It takes account of every variety of taste and temperament, and the discipline prescribed ought to suit every one. Barring very rare and exceptional souls like Sri Ramakrishna who are born with a perfect mind (and a mission to fulfil) this life is to every human being a kind of kindergarten or gymnasium wherein to learn or develop and bring out the best in himself. A study of the Gita will be found very helpful towards this end. You may remember of Sri Ramakrishna's insistence that from a very young age one should apply his mind to God. According to him this

is the *summum bonum* of life. A flower should be offered to God before it fades away and the fruit before it is pecked at by birds and squirrels.

The second question is as good as answered, for, as I have always emphasized, it is not a mere intellectual approach or interest in the Gita that is required, but a practical attempt to apply the teachings to everyday life and conduct.

12. WHY 700?

You seem to fear that the Gita is too long for study. It is not so long. The Valmiki Ramayana has 24,000 verses. Srimad Bhagavatam has 18,000 verses. For almost all the ancient and classical scriptures there are one-verse summaries. They are not actually summaries, but the essence distilled in one verse. You may have heard of the *Ekasloki Ramayanam*. Similarly, there is the one-verse Bhagavatam. There is a verse which goes even further than this. 'What is taught in millions of verses I declare in half a verse. Brahman is real, the world is illusory. The individual soul is Paramatman not anything different.' Half the verse sums up millions of texts. There is a *Gita-Saptasloki* or the seven-versed Gita. Perhaps there may be a one-verse Gita also. Different men consider different verses as containing the essence or the central teaching of the Gita. I, for my part, consider the two words *Yogi Bhava* to be the essence of the Gita.*

It is quite possible to state the essence of any work in a few verses or words even. But it is quite a

*See separate letter on this.

different matter to explain all the relevant aspects and give reasons and arguments. The Bhagavadgita is not written as a text-book or philosophical treatise. It purports to be a conversation between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. Naturally there are questions and answers. Repetition of the same principle or idea or variants of the same idea with different emphasis are, therefore, inevitable.

As a matter of fact 700 verses is not a big number. Several persons repeat the Gita daily in about seventy-five minutes. Constant repetition makes it possible to do it even inside an hour.

In your colleges, you find that the lecturers have to repeat the same idea or argument over and over again. As a student I used to feel that at times the repetitions were much too near the point of producing boredom and headache. Now, I view the matter in a different light. The frequent repetitions made such an indelible impression on my mind that even after thirty years and more I am unable to forget what was taught. As a matter of fact you will find in the Gita not simple repetitions but the same idea or principle examined and explained from different points of view.

The following quotation from *The Man Nobody Knows*, which you admire so much, explains the need for repetition.

> 'One of the sons of President Garfield was travelling with him through Ohio, when the President was addressing country fairs. At the close of the day he asked his boy what he thought of his speeches. The boy was embarrassed by the question.
>
> '"Why .... why, they were fine, dad," he stammered, "but I felt awfully uncomfortable part of the time. You repeated yourself so often; once you said the

very same thing in different words four times over." 'Garfield slapped the boy's shoulder with a hearty laugh.

'"So you thought your old dad was running out of ideas, did you?" he cried. "Well, I don't blame you; but there's a method in his madness. Tomorrow when I reach that passage in my talk, you watch the audience. The first time I make the point, you will see by their faces that a few folks near the platform get it. But farther back, there will be noise and commotion: people will be turning their heads to find out who has just driven up, or what sort of a hat Mrs Jones has on, and they won't hear me at all. When I repeat it the first time a few faces in the middle of the crowd will show a response; on the third go, I'll make still more converts, and on the fourth trial they'll all have a notion of what I am talking about. But it takes four shots to land them all; experience with all sorts of audience has made me sure of that."'

It has been said that 'reputation is repetition'. You cannot impress any important truth upon the minds of any large number of people by uttering it only once. The thoughts Jesus had to give to the world were revolutionary, but they were few in number. 'God is your father,' he said, 'caring more for the welfare of every one of you than any human father can possibly care for his children. His Kingdom is happiness, His rule is love.' This is what he had to teach, but he knew the necessity of driving it home from every possible angle. So in one of his stories God is the shepherd searching the wilds for one wandering sheep; in another, the father welcoming home a prodigal son; in another a king who forgives his debtors large amounts and expects them to be

forgiving in turn—many stories, many advertisements, but the same big idea.

The more substantial reason for repetition or variants in our scriptures is that the ideas are so very complex, subtle and difficult of comprehension.

Take the simple idea of worship. You will find its meaning explained in the dictionary in a few words. But it is not so simple. To different minds it conveys different meanings. There are many classes of worshippers influenced by different motives. The modes and forms of worship are consequently different. Which one is superior, and which one is inferior, which one is comprehensive and which is narrow—all these subtle distinctions cannot be set down in a few words. If you want to preserve the essence and unity or harmony among all grades or variations you will be compelled to describe it in different forms with different emphasis to suit everyone.

The Gita is essentially a gospel of harmony. It does not attempt to disprove or dispute other theories or modes of thought. Its main concern is more with the practical aspect of any theory. Therefore it takes concepts, ideas, from every system or school of philosophy and uses them in their broad and general sense. Sometimes it adds a new meaning. Again, terms like *Yagnya* (Sacrifice), *Tapas* (Penance), etc. are given ascending scales of values as the mathematician would put it.

Another reason for the apparent repetitions is this. Life is a complex affair. Situations in life are as varied as could be imagined. So the paths or individual modes of *Sādhana* or discipline are many. But the goal is the same. Therefore repetitions of a kind are unavoidable.

After all 700 verses are not too many for a complete and satisfactory solution for the various problems of life.

Don't you find repetitions in Sri Ramakrishna's sayings? When you read them do you feel bored? My experience is that both in the Gita and Sri Ramakrishna's sayings the repetitions suggest new meanings or rather give rise to different trains of thoughts and reflections. My final answer would be as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'To kill oneself even a pin is sufficient. But if you want to fight with others you require all sorts of shields and weapons.' It is true the Gita does not fight or controvert any school of thought. It attempts to kill Arjuna's doubts as they rise and give him hope, inspiration and faith. If you are very particular about brevity, you have it with a vengeance in Sri Ramakrishna's one-word commentary or in the two words embodying its central teaching: *Yogi Bhava.*

13. YOGI BHAVA

The two words comprising the title of this letter means simply 'BE A YOGI!' I find from my experience that the word Yoga has often been misunderstood. In many places after my usual formal public lectures, there used to be another formality of private interviews and personal questions. Almost invariably I was disappointed with such proceedings. Ninety-nine per cent of those that came did not care for true spiritual life. They all wanted some short cut, some trick, magic or charm to gain very poor and paltry things. Very very old men wanting to become young, barren women wanting a child, the poor pining to become rich and students anxious to pass their examinations. They did not often put their questions in this straightforward way. They would plead, 'Please teach me Yoga.' A further question

would soon elicit that they have only fantastic or vague ideas of Yoga. They wanted to gain the things they desired by a leap, so to say, in as quick a time as possible, without the slightest exertion. I find to my surprise that there are so many books on Yoga in the market with attractive titles. Without casting any reflection on the worthy and eminent authors of these books I cannot help saying that such indiscriminate teaching and propaganda has done more harm than good. What attract these superficial seekers are the marvellous powers or *Siddhis* said to be obtainable through mastery of any one or other branch of Yoga. I have known cases of very estimable and young persons going mad or falling victims to tuberculosis, or to some chronic disorders of the system. Control of breath or gazing at the sky or upon this or that object in a particular way is not the main thing in Yoga.

There are also various false notions about Yoga current among people of all sorts and conditions of life. To mention only a few: A Yogi should grow a beard. He should abstain from salt or oil or mustard. He should not eat ordinary food. He should live only on milk and fruits. He should observe silence, but may go on writing sheet after sheet of paper all the twenty-four hours. He must grow finger-nails. He must not bathe. He must live in a cave, natural or artificial, smearing the body with ashes or dirt even. He must talk incoherently, etc., etc. These and a thousand similar eccentric things form part of the picture that arises before the minds of ordinary persons when they hear the word 'Yogi'. The Yogi, according to the Gita, has nothing whatsoever to do with any such nonsense. But right living, right conduct, is the only sure foundation upon which you can hope to build anything stable and solid. The Bhagavadgita says in Chap. VI, verses 16 and 17:

'Success in Yoga is not for him who eats too much or too little; nor O Arjuna! for him who sleeps too much or too little. To him who is temperate in eating and recreation, in his effort for work and in sleep and wakefulness, Yoga becomes the destroyer of misery.'

This is the most important condition with respect to the practice of any Yoga.

Be a Yogi is the central teaching of the Gita. This simply means that one should realize the ideal of a perfect man. In short, *Be a Yogi* means to live in the world yet not to be caught in the wheel of *samsāra* or get drowned in worldliness. Everybody does work. The ordinary worker gets bound. The Yogi also does work, but remains free. One works like the galley slave, the other like the master artist. The one labours, whipped by necessity, the other plays the game like a true sportsman. How to acquire the skill, trick or dexterity in work is really the secret of success in life.

You have to live in the world. You have plans to work out, and you expect to achieve some measure of success. The only royal road to success is the way of Yoga. You may be a contemplative person with interest in *japa* and meditation, *pujah* or *pārāyanam*. You will be a Yogi of one type. Another is fond of philosophy, is capable of discriminating between the real and the unreal. This person is a Yogi of another type. A third one devotes his entire life to some form of service such as teaching the ignorant, relieving the suffering of others and engaging in all forms of beneficent activity. Each one of these is a form of Yoga. If one is not a Yogi he passes his life like a reed in a tempestuous sea. Even the most fortunate in this world does not enjoy an unbroken record of happiness,

success and good luck. What will sustain him when things go wrong and the unexpected happens and spoils his plans and expectations, causing dismay and discomfort? Nothing. But a Yogi never falls a victim to the snares of fortune. He does not in fact crave for any result. He has no eye for gain. It is enough if he works as his duty demands. That is in itself a joy and satisfaction. This is taught throughout the Gita. Hence the Gita is called *Yogasāstra;* every one of the eighteen Chapters is named as some Yoga or other. And in the last verse you will find the Lord is described as *Yogeswara* and Arjuna as the typical man. Wherever you find any act after the example of the Lord of Yoga success is assured.

> Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of Yoga, wherever is Partha, wielder of the bow, there are prosperity, victory, expansion and sound policy: such is my conviction.'

A perfect Yogi would feel as Sri Ramakrishna used to declare in his daily prayer to the Divine Mother: 'You are the operator and I am the instrument. I say what you make me say. I walk as you lead me on.' This is the essence of Yoga.

If you can single out any particular word which is more often repeated than any other it is the word 'Yoga'. If this is not the central teaching of the Gita, I do not know what else it could be. Read and allow the Gita to soak into your mind, attune yourself to its spirit and outlook and then you could easily learn to live and act as a true Yogi. You will be fulfilling, both in the letter and in the spirit, the most important commandment of the Lord (or the central teaching of the Gita) *Yogi Bhava.*

14. SPOKE THESE WORDS IN SORROW

Vishīdaṃ idamabṛvīt

Perhaps you are becoming impatient of all these preliminaries. We straightway begin the Gita. A learned scholar was once discoursing on the Gita. A friend who had listened to him came and told me that for the first verse of the Gita the savant gave thirty-two different interpretations. I was naturally curious to know how the simple verse:

Dharma kśétré Kurukśétré samavétā yuyutsavah
Māmakāh Pāṇḍavāscaiva kimakurvata Sanjaya

could yield so many meanings. When questioned about the details, the friend could only say that the discourse was so learned that he could make neither head nor tail of it. I shall give you just one example to show how far-fetched and fantastic these innumerable interpretations can sometimes be. The friend was telling me what he had heard. The first verse begins with the word *Dharma* and the last two letters happen to be *Ja* and *Ya*. Therefore, if you follow Dharma, meaning our Sanatana Dharma, you will be crowned with success or victory (*Jaya*). I might as well say the last two letters being *Ja, Ya,* the Lord thought of you in anticipation in the first verse!

I may tell you at the outset that you should not expect from me any meaning other than the most simple, plain, straightforward one, that which strikes a lay mind with only commonsense as its guide. Now let us proceed.

The first verse no doubt gives rise to esoteric or allegorical interpretation. Mahatma Gandhi, in his brief and interesting *Anasak Yoga* (Gita) writes in the note to the first verse (which I have translated freely) thus:

'The human body is the field (*kshetra*) for the cultivation of virtues (*Dharma*), for this may lead even as if through a door to liberation (*moksha*). It arises from sin and lives and grows in it, and hence it is called Kurukshetra. In every human breast there is an eternal battle going on between good and evil impulses, i.e. Pandavas or *daivic* qualities and Kauravas or *asuric* qualities.'

Who has not direct experience of such a fact? In his introduction to this book he observes that he does not consider the Bhagavadgita or the Mahabharata even, for that matter, as historical in the modern sense of the term. 'The battlefield, the human combatants, etc. are only dramatic representations of the eternal fight going on between good and evil in all human beings.' His main reason for this view is that the author of the Mahabharata introduced historical characters simply to teach the highest Dharma: *Ahimsa*; for, 'the whole work proves the futility of armed force. It pictures the victors weeping in grief, full of repentance, and gaining nothing but misery.'

No one can take objection to this interpretation. It has got for its support well-established tradition. But, if we lay too much emphasis on the allegorical interpretation, the Gita will then appear as a mere code of ethics or a text-book on morals. Much of the dramatic play, action, thrill and movement will be lost. The introduction of Arjuna and Sri Krishna as the chief dramatic personages, the historic incidents as the stage or background and the conversational style and form with doubts and questions and intimate and personal explanations, all combine to make it so realistic and human. We often feel that we are in the same position as Arjuna and the teaching comes home to us with so much force

that we cannot escape being influenced by it in some measure or other. We shall try to understand the Gita in a simple way and take the text at its face value. I resist the temptation to say anything beyond that it is just the opening verse and the meaning is very plain.

Sri Sankaracharya begins his famous commentary only from the eleventh verse of the second chapter. This does not mean that all the previous verses serve no purpose. From his special point of view what matters to him is only the text from II, 11.

Now we shall take all the verses from I, 2 to I, 23. These give a graphic account of the disposition of the forces, the names of the prominent warriors on either side, the blowing of conchs and trumpets, and Arjuna desiring to review the entire forces ranged on his side and against him. It is curious that the Pandava forces are described as if they were destined to come out victorious and the other fated to go under. This is patent when we compare the descriptions of the effects of the blowing of conchs on either side. Please note also that the names of the conchs of Sri Krishna and the five Pandava brothers alone are mentioned by their special names, while not even that of the grandsire, Bhishma, is referred to by its name. If we notice any more such points we shall be committing the same error as the scholar with thirty-two meanings. Verses 24 to 27 describe Arjuna's survey of the forces assembled on the field. We now come to verse 28 beginning with *Kṛpayā parayāvishṭah.* What does this mean? For the sake of convenience we may consider the next two verses also together and examine their implications: *Kṛpayā parayāvishṭah* (filled with extreme or deep compassion), *vishīdaṃ* (sorrowfully) *idamabravīt* (spoke these words). The other two verses 29 and 30 graphically describe Arjuna's physical reactions

to this feeling of compassion. Several scholars have interpreted these verses in various ways, such as implying a conflict of duties, a sort of cowardice born out of compassion, fear about the ultimate issue, etc. This is simply to apprise you beforehand of the conflicting interpretations that you may come across in your Gita lectures, etc. There is no harm in being familiar with the pros and cons in respect of these interpretations, but it is not necessary to take any particular side or arrive at any definite decision. Our interest may be, or ought to be, purely practical and how we are going to order our life and conduct by the teaching of the Gita. As we shall see presently, Arjuna refers again and again to the consequences of the sanguinary fight, its fruits in sorrow and misery here on earth and endless suffering in hell hereafter. Nor does it seem possible that a seasoned warrior like Arjuna, the victorious hero of a thousand battles, assured of the help, guidance and companionship of Sri Krishna himself, could for a moment have been afraid on any other ground. The picture of Arjuna in I, 29, 30 easily admits of some other explanation. It is undoubtedly true that great and powerful mental and emotional storms often produce correspondingly striking physical changes. The parching of the mouth, the shivering and burning feeling of the body and other symptoms described could very well be understood as the physical reaction to his extreme horror of the impending slaughter of his own grandsire and teachers and of the other tragic and catastrophic consequences of the fight. They need not have been caused only by cowardice, compassion or conflict of duties. You might have read *Julius Caesar* for one of your examinations. When the Senators begin to rain deadly blows on him, Caesar valiantly defends himself; but

when he finds even Brutus striking, he is taken by surprise, he is paralysed and succumbs. His 'Et tu Brute' tells its own tale. Arjuna, who appears on the battle-field prompted by a sense of duty, sees before him his dear and venerable grandsire Bhishma and Acharya (Drona) and others. He finds himself faced by the grim reality that he will have to stain his sword and dip it in the blood of those dear and venerable persons. This fills him with utter horror and unspeakable revulsion. All the physical and bodily changes described in the Gita follow as a matter of course.

It is also noteworthy that Arjuna, not even once in this chapter, seems to contemplate the remote possibility of his being defeated in the battle. Again and again he harps only on the consequences of such warfare—social chaos and confusion, admixture of races and the manes deprived of their due offerings, etc. and the terrible *Sin* resulting therefrom. He therefore prefers to be slain in battle by his enemies, *himself not fighting*.

15. 'I DESIRE NO VICTORY'

Na kānkṣé vijayam

Let us now consider the remaining verses of the chapter. These describe Arjuna thinking aloud. They give a glimpse into his mind, and as such deserve to be studied with care and attention. In fact this is a preliminary picture of the problem of the Gita, which is also the problem of our own lives.

Arjuna's argument is this:

1. He sees no good in the slaughter of his grandsire, Acharya and relatives, rather he sees it all as evil.

2. On these terms and at such a price he does not care for victory, kingdom, enjoyment or even the preservation of his own life.
3. The gain is only *Sin* (*pāpaméva*), misery, and hell hereafter.
4. He is convinced that what he is about to do is an unmitigated Sin (*bata mahatpāpam*) and he must withdraw at any cost.

This word *Sin* is naturally jarring to your modern ears. Such a point of view is out of fashion, but Arjuna did not live in the twentieth century. He only spoke the language familiar to him, the language of his time. We must try to understand the working of his mind. We ought not to quarrel with the terms used. What you and I are familiar with today may become antiquated and unintelligible a century hence. For example, to the children of Russia today such terms as God, Czar, Czarina, Count, Duke, Serf, etc. cannot convey any real meaning or significance, although to their grand-parents, they meant grim realities.

Let the term used by Arjuna be what it may. We ought to consider merely its meaning or import. In fact there are two phases in Arjuna's argument. The first is purely personal—his reluctance to kill venerable elders, teachers and relatives, as no happiness, but only misery, would be his lot after winning victory over them. You may remember (in your Indian History) that although Sivaji succeeded in capturing the invaluable stronghold of Simhagad, he wept bitterly because he had lost his right hand, viz. Thanaji. Arjuna believes that he will suffer torment in hell even though he kills them in battle as part of his duty. Strictly speaking, he should have stopped at this and declared his intention to withdraw from the fight. But as often happens in our own case,

especially with persons who have had some literary education and social polish, the intellect, like a clever advocate, plays its usual trick of representing ourselves as higher, nobler and more disinterested than we actually are. It is a ridiculous inflation of the ego for Arjuna to argue that society will go to the dogs, that Sanatana Dharma will be destroyed and that there will be an admixture of races, etc. For this argument conceals the true motive or personal reasons, and Arjuna wants us to believe that his reluctance is based on altruistic and moral grounds only. What is this society at whose altar even the modern world and civilized men and women immolate themselves? It is simply one phase of communal life resulting from a particular set of forces and conditions, and is bound to change when these conditions change. Every form of society contains in itself the causes of its dissolution. You are a student of history. Can you cite a single instance of any particular form of society that has endured beyond a few centuries? Why make too much of this soap-bubble, so to say? Do you imagine that one of the modern Trinity, namely, the 'Socialist State', is anything more enduring than such a bubble? Arjuna's talk about *Kuladharma* and *Jātidharma* cannot stand close scrutiny from a purely rationalistic view.

We must recognize in Dharma two aspects, the eternal aspect and the temporal aspect. All Arjuna's arguments relate to the latter only. You will remember Sri Ramakrishna's telling description of *the World* as the dog's curly tail. Swami Vivekananda describes social reform as an effort to cure chronic rheumatism. You drive it from one place only to find it in another. These two modern teachers ask us to regard society, not as an end in itself, but as a means, a training ground, a kind

of kindergarten, to draw out and manifest the individual's inherent divinity. Society has no claim comparable to that of the human personality to grow to its full height. I might point out that the modern outlook, especially of Europe, is diametrically opposed to our ancient and eternal Dharma. The former regards society as everything and holds that individuals have no value beyond the fact that they serve the purposes of this society. Our people regard the personality of the individual as sacred and a supreme end in itself. Where the question of perfection of the individual is involved all other interests must be subordinated.

Ātmārtham pṛthviṃ tyajét

All that I mean is that society's claims upon us are not paramount and absolute, but relative and valid only within certain well-defined limits. Society is for individuals and not individuals for society. This is a big question involving the outlook of the East and West and may be discussed at some future occasion.

To proceed with Arjuna's arguments: He is prepared to withdraw solely because of the unpleasant consequences. When I asked you to shoulder a simple responsibility not only for your own comfort but also in the interests of your hundred odd fellow-students residing in your hostel, you trotted out all sorts of specious excuses. You said, 'It is needless botheration; no one will heed my words. I shall not be able to please everybody; I shall get into hot waters with the authorities, etc. You may remember you added that you would be content with tasteless food, or even go without that. This is what Arjuna means when he says (II, 5):

'It is better to live on alms in this world without slaying these noble elders, because even after killing

them, we shall enjoy only blood-stained pleasures in the form of wealth and sense enjoyments.'

I trust you have no difficulty in understanding Arjuna's mentality. Lord Sri Krishna expected from him a better example and a truer and higher sense of duty and his disappointment is the striking note of his thundering opening verses in the next chapter: 'Pleasant or unpleasant we must perform our duty.'

16.. 'ARISE, SCORCHER OF FOES'

Uthishta parantapa

Now we come to the second chapter. When I was young the eldest member of our household used to read the Ramayanam or Srimad Bhagavatam in the original and expound it in colloquial language to the assembled men, women and children. He had a 'tamboora' and sang the verses in sweet musical tones. Even the prose discourse became musical and poetical. There used to be ceremonies: worship of the book and the Deity and some *prasādam* was distributed at the end. Some such thing you might have observed on the Ganges Ghat in Benares. In South India such discourses attract thousands of listeners and several scholars specialize in such exposition. Even if you have not attended a series regularly, you have no difficulty in following any particular day's discourse, for the *Paurānika* (expounder) repeats these two phrases: '*Athya vartamāna kathāprasanga*' and '*Pūrva kathā sangrahasca*'. Under the latter heading he gives a brief summary of the previous story which enables you to follow the following exposition. The first verse in the second chapter is just a summary of the previous chapter (*pūrva kathā sangraha*). If you read this verse

carefully you will find that you have got here the essence of the first chapter. Even though it might appear as a needless repetition, I must draw your attention to the phrases (1) *Kṛpayā vishtam* (2) *asru pūrṇam* (3) *vishīdantam*. Only when you have a vivid picture of Arjuna in this sad plight can you appreciate the full force and significance of Sri Krishna's first utterance in chapter II, verse 2, 3. If one of your friends is sorrow-stricken or weeping you naturally speak very gently to her, express your sympathy and do everything possible to drive away her misery. If your friend happens to be a very intimate one you might wipe off the tears, stroke her back and take her by the hand for a walk or do some such thing to drive away the cloud of gloom. Sri Krishna does nothing of this kind although he is a life-long and true friend of Arjuna. But he thunders in contempt and mockery:

Kutastvā kasmalamidaṃ vishamé samupasthitaṃ
Anāryajushtamasvargyamakīrtikaramarjuna

There is no softness or sympathy but surprise, even contempt and ridicule. He calls him unmanly and chicken-hearted and pulls him up with a sudden jerk, as if rescuing a man from being drowned.

An interesting parallel comes to my mind. In a football tournament our college won the shield twice successively. If we could win the third time in succession we could retain the trophy permanently as a 'college' trophy. You know what tremendous value all sportsmen attach to such trophies. The final match was being played. On the opposing side the toughest player was a big rough and very irritable member on the rival college's staff. There were hardly fifteen minutes for the close. It was a hot contest. One of our

forwards who was usually dependable lost his nerve and at a critical corner when this big man attacked him, he shrank back, stunned as it were. This did not escape the ever vigilant eyes of our captain. He sternly rebuked the forward: 'Fool! steady; play on!' These three words worked like magic and in an instant he darted back, took the ball from the Professor, the goal was scored and we won! It was nearly thirty-five years ago, perhaps more; yet even today I can recall the incident vividly. Those three words, 'Fool! steady, play on' form an eloquent echo of the Lord's clarion call to duty.

We must notice carefully every word and grasp its full import and significance. You may recollect that Arjuna's decision to withdraw from the fight was based on the following grounds:

1. He did not see any (*śréyas*) good, virtue or merit accruing to him from this war. (chapter I, 31)
2. He could not hope to feel happy or enjoy life after the fratricidal slaughter (*katham sukhinasyāma*—I, 37)
3. He would have to suffer hell indefinitely (*naraké niyatamvāsah*—I, 44)
4. That sin alone will accrue to the Pandavas after victory, perhaps ill-fame as well (*pāpaméva asrayét*)

The Lord's first utterance in reply is a classical example of 'Rebuttal of a dilemma' which any student of Logic will know and recognize. Arjuna is told that his withdrawal is '*Anārya*', that is, mean, '*Asreya*', ignoble, '*Asvargya*', not leading to Heaven, '*Akirtikaram*', not leading to fame—the very things which have weighed so much in Arjuna's balancing of losses and gains. '*Kuta*', which literally means 'how' or 'wherefrom', has so much significance that it is not possible to detail and

exhaust all the implications. It is used to express surprise, contempt, ridicule, etc. The next word is '*Kaśmalam*', dejection unbecoming of you. These terms do not betoken any trace of the sympathy ordinarily expected of a friend. But the next verse contains all the sincere love of a true friend, words infusing cheer and vigour in a drooping man.

> 'Yield not to unmanliness, Arjuna; ill does it become you. Shaking off this paltry faint-heartedness arise O! Scorcher of your enemies!'

Perhaps Sri Krishna intends to apply a sort of mustard plaster by flinging at him such terms as '*Klaibyam*' and '*hṛdayadaurbalyam*' which are galling and which wound to the quick. Arjuna, the Lord knows full well, is a bold hero with a brave heart and wants to rouse him, prevent him from being swept off his feet by his innate gentleness and refinement.

It is good to take a sympathetic view of Arjuna's difficulties. His horror at the mere idea of killing his grandsire and others shows the human aspect even in a seasoned warrior. But carried to an extreme softness or sentimentality will cut all Dharma or ethics at its very roots. Anybody called upon to discharge an unpleasant duty can argue as Arjuna does. Duty is a categorical imperative, as the philosophers put it. Whether it pleases you or pains you the call of duty is paramount and must be obeyed implicitly. This is the Lord's motive for dealing hard blows to rouse the afflicted Arjuna. If Arjuna could not rise above the level of ordinary human beings always swayed by considerations pleasant or otherwise, how can he be the Lord's chosen instrument, the model for humanity to follow? The Lord had selected him for this role and there was none else who could fulfil this mission.

It is interesting to note that in recent times an exact parallel is found in the relation of Sri Ramakrishna to Swami Vivekananda. The following quotation is taken from Romain Rolland's *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (page 280).

'One day Swami Shivananda told me he was present in the garden of Cossipore near Calcutta when Naren really attained this (*Nirvikalpa*) state. Seeing him unconscious, his body as cold as that of a corpse, we ran in great agitation to the Master and told him what had happened. The Master showed no anxiety; he merely smiled and said: "Very well!" and then relapsed into silence. Naren returned to outward consciousness and came to the Master. The Master said to him: "Well, now do you understand? This (the highest realization) will hence forward remain under lock and key. You have the Mother's work to do. When it is finished, She will undo the lock." Naren replied: "Master, I was happy in *Samādhi*. In my infinite joy I had forgotten the world. I beseech you to let me remain in that state." "For shame!" cried the Master. "How can you ask such things? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man! The realization will become so natural to you, by the grace of the Mother, that in your normal state you will realize the One Divinity in all beings. You will do great things in the world. You will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor!"

'He had discerned the role for which Vivekananda was cast, and against his will he forced him to play it.

'"Ordinary souls," he said, "fear to assume the responsibility of instructing the world. A worthless piece of wood can only just manage to float, and if a bird settles on it, it immediately sinks. But Naren is different. He is like the great tree trunks, bearing men and beasts upon the bosom of the Ganges."

'He had marked on the giant's forehead the sign of St. Christopher the carrier of men.'

The next three verses (Ch. II—4, 5, 6) deserve notice. They reveal the working of Arjuna's mind even more clearly than the forty and odd verses of the first chapter. The sum and substance of Arjuna's reluctance to do his duty was his extreme horror at being compelled by circumstances to kill Bhishma, Drona and other revered souls. There is no point in arguing that he knew these were ranged on Duryodhana's side and that he would have to fight them. When we sit quietly in our room and decide upon a course of action, after weighing all the pros and cons, a particular decision made may be felt as a matter of sacred duty and we thereupon proceed to translate it into action. Very often the hitch comes only when we begin to execute the decision. I well remember your giving an intellectual assent to my discourse on your duty in the matter we discussed relating to your hostel. You said, 'It is all true, *but* . . . .'. Although you did not give verbal expression to all that was passing in your mind, I could easily guess that you were fighting shy of the odium you may incur without being sure of achieving any good. This is exactly Arjuna's plight. He says: 'How am I to kill with arrows dear and honourable Bhishma and respected Drona to whom worship is always due. I would much prefer to live by begging than to enjoy anything acquired with hands stained with the

blood of those near and dear to me.' It is interesting to note that the two names Bhishma and Drona are often repeated in this context. The one stands for all that is dear and near in the domestic sphere and the other, in the spiritual domain.

Suppose someone asks you to lend her your favourite book. You have no inclination to oblige. You do not say so in so many words. You first give one excuse. When that is met you give another. When that is also answered, you finally come out with the real reason. 'I am so sorry I cannot part with it because it is my favourite book.' This is what Arjuna did in the first chapter. His talk about sin, society going to chaos, kuladharma or tradition being lost and so on are all the cobweb of excuses which his intellect spun out to conceal the real reason behind his aversion to kill those near and dear to him. When the Lord exposed the utter hollowness of his arguments and smashed them, he comes out with the true motive. He frankly confesses his utter disgust, his revulsion at the idea of killing his grandsire and teacher. Although the arguments of sin, hell-fire, etc. are not without their due weight, he would not have flinched from or shirked his duty if he had to kill others in battle. 'Well begun is half done' says the proverb. To understand the real difficulty of Arjuna, the motives that were playing in his mind, is a vital point. This alone can help us to understand correctly, not only the Lord's various arguments at this stage, but also the general tenor and teaching of the Gita. Let us take another example from everyday life. An F. R. C. S. and a renowned surgeon, who had been performing scores of major operations every month successfully, once called in another surgeon to open a simple boil on his child's arm. I asked him why he could not do it himself. He

replied, 'When operating upon others, my hands and nerves are steady. I am not quite so sure when the patient on the table is my own dear child. If she cries, the father in me might put away the doctor. Hence it is more or less a convention that we doctors call some other friend to treat the members of our own family.' Well! If this is the effect of feelings and emotions even when it is a curative operation, it is not surprising that the idea of the killing with deadly weapons of one's own dear and venerable grandsire and teacher should have filled with horror and revulsion gentle Arjuna and for the moment completely suppressed the warrior in him. But it is a moment calling for vigorous action. Hence we find the Lord giving hard blows at Arjuna's sentimentality to rouse the warrior in him. We find as a matter of fact the Lord's opening utterance goes home and the first effect is a conflict between the heart and the head which is well brought out in the phrase:

Kārpaṇyadoshopahatah. . . . dharma sammūḍacétāh

We have already seen that in actual life there often exists a wide gulf between the intellectual conception or conviction of imperative duty and the resolution required for actual execution. When we are faced with such a dilemma, what are we to do? We can do no better than follow Arjuna's example. We find him seeking shelter under the Lotus feet of the Lord Sri Krishna and begging for His advice. He asks for a definite lead as he is thoroughly bewildered. He cannot decide what is the best thing to hold on to under all circumstances and what to give up *dharma sammūḍa cétāh.* No advice bears any fruit unless the pupil has faith and confidence in the teacher and is quite ready to follow the teacher. 'I am thy disciple, instruct me,' has therefore

a deep significance. In my letter on *Teacher and Disciple* this relationship has been discussed at length. Verses 6 and 8 are a mere repetition and 9 and 10 form connecting links.

There is one important word in verse 10: *prahasanniva* (as if smiling). It is a smile at the big soap bubbles of specious excuses based on Dharma, Sin, etc. which Arjuna has been at pains to trot out. Notice a similar echo *prajñā vādāmśca bhāshasé*—repeating like a parrot scriptural wisdom.

17. 'THOU SHOULD NOT GRIEVE'

Na tvam śôcitum arhasi

Arjuna is the model disciple who seeks light and guidance from the perfect teacher. The Lord Sri Krishna begins his teachings with the most sublime truth. The group of verses 11-20 contains the quintessence of the teaching of the Vedanta. You have read the works of Swami Vivekananda and have some idea of the Vedanta as presented by him. I shall not go into the details of the Vedanta.

A man is not his body nor even his mind. There is something else which alone can describe his personality. This is the soul or *ātman*. It is described as eternal, free, pure and omniscient. (*Nitya, Mukta, Śuddha, Buddha*). It was never born and is never destroyed. Different and conflicting views, philosophical schools or systems of thought—all arise in attempts to determine the nature of this supreme principle or truth. Let us consider some of these as we proceed.

Verses 11-13 emphasize the immortal and eternal nature of the Soul. This is purely philosophical.

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Verses 14 and 15 take up the psychological and practical question, a fact of daily occurrence. These verses offer many lessons in the philosophy of Emotions. It is well worth all the attentions of the psychologist. Our attitude towards dualities such as heat and cold, pain and pleasure ought to be one of preparation to endure them or to suffer them to come and go without being moved by them. No conceivable pleasure on earth abides for an indefinitely long time. So also pain. Even the worst calamity, when it has come, becomes a thing of the past. Fear arises always from the pain in prospect, as pleasure lies in the expectation of future happiness. The advice to endure or suffer these unmoved is both practical and sound. There is the implication that these refer to and concern the body and mind only, and not the soul or *ātman*. The trouble arises in mistaking the unreal body and mind for our true selves.

We are not sure of what the future may bring. Neither can we order the outside world to our convenience or pleasure. The only wise and safe course is to rise above this play of duality, pain and pleasure and the like, and remain unaffected. The cultivation and practice of such a detached outlook ultimately leads to a perfect state of bliss or immortality. Verses 16-28 state that it is ignorance which identifies the body with the soul. Correct reasoning ought to convince one that such a false identification has no true basis. Verses 23-25 state in sublime poetic form the doctrine and true nature of the eternal soul or *ātman*. The moral is obvious. In verses 26-28, you get the essence of the modern scientific view of matter and mind. That which has a beginning must have an end. Whatever is a product or combination must undergo dissolution. Nothing comes out of nothing. The sum total of energy is constant. All

the phenomena in the world are but mere changes in the form of energy. All such scientific and experimental truths are contained in these three verses.

The implication of verse 27 you might hear from the lips of country farmers, street hawkers and even illiterate old women. Even little boys playing marbles on the streets or youths when they gird up their loins to fight their opponents express this very sentiment in the Tamil proverb which says: 'Death may come at the age of six or hundred. Come let us fight to a finish.' These instances show how much this idea has filtered through all the strata of society. You can breathe it in the atmosphere of any Hindu home. In fact it is the quintessence of popular philosophy. It gives more real peace and solace in times of calamity to the masses than the learned discourses and sermons. In verse 29, instead of 'wonder' the moderns may call it 'madness' to speak about the soul of man. One who seeks to know that which abides unchanged at all times is really rare.

Jesus Christ preached 2000 years ago what we should do to bring in truth the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The Sermon on the Mount is so simple that even a child can understand it. The last world war with all its nameless horrors and brutality shows how deeply his so-called followers have imbibed his teaching. Christ exclaimed in wonder and dismay at the obtuseness and blindness of the common people: 'Those who have ears let them hear, those that have eyes, let them see.' Christ echoed but the sentiment of verse 29. Verse 30 reiterates that there is no room for grief when the true nature of *ātman* is realized. But an assassin or a murderer cannot however take shelter under this argument to justify his being a slave to wild passions and anger; he stands far from this state of realization. Slaying another

for lust or other personal motives can in no wise be construed as Dharma. It will be an instance of the devil quoting the scriptures if a murderer uses this text. Verses 31, 32 and 33 clearly say that for the Kshatriya there cannot be anything more meritorious than a righteous war. Please note that even for a warrior-ure Kshatriya any war is not justified nor does it become his duty to fight except under well defined conditions. Fighting in such a war alone brings him religious merit and glory. Running away he incurs sin and infamy.

The argument of the next three verses (34, 35 and 36) comes down to the popular level. Benefactors to humanity live long after their death. Posterity remembers them gratefully for long. In fact they become in a sense immortal. Their statues are erected, anniversaries celebrated and so on. Can we rightly say that Rama, Krishna, the Buddha, Christ are all dead? Are they not living eternally enshrined in the hearts of millions of their devotees and followers?

As a student of history you may recall many personalities of the bygone ages, like Asoka and Sivaji, who have also become immortal by their meritorious deeds. The reverse is also true. Those men are dead even when they are alive, who lose their caste or reputation. You and I, living in modern conditions, can hardly realize what a terrible calamity it was to lose one's caste or the goodwill and esteem of one's fellowmen. The ostracism inflicted by the castemen or tribesmen on an individual was many times more cruel than death itself. Today, for example, a jockey who is suspected of any underhand dealing in a turf club loses caste, so to say, and nowhere in the world can he gain admission or social recognition. Such a severe and effective boycott may occur only among fashionable and civilized people

in restricted circles like turfs, select clubs and in sports. Though public opinion in this country is not at present quite free, normal or well organized, at least in the student-world, more so in sports, the loss of the regard and esteem of one's fellows is worse than death. So, Sri Krishna's warning that Arjuna will fall in the estimation of his compeers, and that it is even worse than death *Maraṇādatiricyaté* must have had a hundred-fold more force and weight in those days than now.

Verse 37 became very popular on all public platforms during the last great war. The National Front Movement leaders found it handy as a recruiting slogan. An Indian doctor, a Colonel in the I. M. S. met me while he was visiting his home on leave recently. He described an entertainment show got up for the benefit of the soldiers fighting on a far off front and he emphasized how thrilled he was to discover that illiterate Indian sepoys recruited from the remote countryside derived much consolation and courage when this verse was sung at this programme. The soldiers were found repeating this verse, as an effective weapon for fighting all their fears. It was a source from which they derived fresh vigour and courage. When we are assailed by doubts, when we are torn by intellectual and mental conflict, it is helpful to have a clear decision and then plunge into action, saying to ourselves 'come what may'. The Lord seems to say to Arjuna, 'If you die fighting as a true Kshatriya, you will gain *Veera Swargam*. If you become victorious, you will become the master of the earth. Therefore rise, gird up your loins and fight with an iron will.' This argument can hold good whatever philosophical position one is inclined to take regarding the ultimate nature of man's soul, mind and body. This could be taken as having a much wider application not

only in actual wars but in all moral conflicts as well. It emphasizes that inner satisfaction which we ought to attain when we have done our best under the circumstances. It may be preparing for an examination, or serving our near and dear ones or the giving of medical aid to dying people or any other similar situation. When we translate Sri Krishna's advice as a general rule of conduct for all men, it amounts to this: We cannot always gain what we wish for. Other factors beyond our control intervene. We must not omit or neglect that which is in our power to perform. That is all. After we have done the utmost in our power we must train ourselves to accept the results calmly.

Now we may review briefly the general trend of the verses 11 to 37. Some might get puzzled. At one stage the argument is on the highest philosophical plane. At another we find it descends to ordinary materialistic aims. Again at another stage we find justification sought in terms of gaining fame and the good opinion of others. The fear of Mrs Grundy even is given weight. Pauranic ideas of *Swarga*, *Naraka*, caste-enjoined duties of *Swadharma* are also requisitioned. If we examine a little closely, there is nothing unusual or strange in this mixing of motives and aims. I was once called by the High Court to serve as a juror. The arguments advanced by the defence counsel seemed to my lay mind a jumble of contradictions. All the same they are all considered very sound by competent legal opinion. The first position taken by the counsel was that his client was not at all present anywhere near the scene of the murder, and that there were proofs about his presence at a place 100 miles away. This they call pleading '*alibi*'. The second argument was, 'Even if he had been present at the place, he could not have committed the murder.'

Next, 'Even if he did commit the crime it could have been only in self-defence.' 'If self-defence was not accepted, he at least could not do it wilfully and intentionally.' 'Even if all these were not accepted, he prayed to the court for mercy and a light sentence.' We cannot ask how if the *alibi* was true, on what grounds he can put forward the succeeding arguments which are inconsistent with it.

If 'the *ātman* never dies or is never born' be true then all the other arguments would seem to be inconsistent. The explanation is this: The lawyer is not merely concerned with the proving or disproving of a particular argument. It is a question of life and death with his client. At any cost he must try to save him from the gallows. In the case of Arjuna he was at the point of being drowned in sorrow. He had to be saved; it was essential that he was roused to act according to his Dharma. Highest philosophy, popular arguments and hitting at his personal pride and honour, in fact, every conceivable line of argument is made use of. Perhaps the orthodox will be shocked at this interpretation on the analogy of the law court. On the other hand to my own mind the Lord's teaching becomes more practical, human, perfect and sublime for the very reason it takes account of every grade or level of the human mind and its varied interests. If he cannot serve and take in all sorts of people how can he be the true God of all? At any rate we all are a mixed bag of desires and a multiple-faced argument goes home.

This verse 37 not only sums up the arguments that have gone before but also hints very neatly at what follows. You will notice that from the next verse (38) onwards, the Lord emphasizes on the attainment of perfect equanimity of mind or in other words asks Arjuna to

become a Yogi (*Yogi bhava*). It means simply this: 'We are to do the duty pertaining to our station in life without being influenced by the consideration of the fruits of actions.'

18. 'THOU WILT BREAK THROUGH THE BONDS OF ACTION'

Karmabandham prahāsyasi

Whatever be one's philosophical position or attitude towards the ultimate realities of life, one has to live and act somehow from day to day. How to do this so as to derive the maximum benefit and satisfaction therefrom is the problem of all problems. The Lord tackles this question next. In fact throughout the Gita this problem is always kept in view. Verse 38 says:

Sukhadukhé samékṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau
Tatôyuddhāya yujyasva naivam pāpamavāpsyasi

'Treating alike pain and pleasure, gain and loss, conquest and defeat, engage thou then in battle. So shalt thou incur no sin.'

This is a commentary on the spirit underlying the teaching in the previous verse. There are two aspects of this question. The first is an intellectual and philosophical problem. The second is purely practical concerning the process or means of attaining the goal. When we are able to act without being swayed by pleasure or pain, gain or loss, what do we achieve? We are not caught and bound in the meshes of our action. Granting that we gain so much, *how to attain* to that level of mind which everybody would naturally wish to reach? The Lord, perfect teacher that He is, answers the first

question first. We noticed that Arjuna's decision to withdraw from the battle was due in a large measure to his horror of shedding the blood of his near and dear ones. The act appeared to him as a heinous sin (*mahat pāpa*) involving suffering in hell for an indefinite period (*Narake niyatam vāsam*).

The Lord squarely and categorically tells Arjuna 'the terrible sin you dread so much will not affect you. Only you must attain equanimity and maintain that attitude.' '*Naivam pāpamavāpsyasi*' is therefore a very happy assurance. It is sure to arouse Arjuna's interest, grip his attention and make him eager to listen to what follows. Before you expect a person to take your advice, you must first convince him intellectually that he can gain what he is most anxious to attain.

As for the second aspect of the problem, the entire Gita is concerned with it.

You must also remember that these are not two different problems but only different aspects of one and the same problem. Sometimes the emphasis is on the means and sometimes on the goal. You may grow impatient and ask: 'How can anyone view pleasure and pain, gain and loss with the same frame of mind?' The answer is: 'If you cannot do so, you cannot attain real happiness.' You will be tossed about on the ocean of endless births and deaths, more suffering and little joy. The Buddha has taught that everything in the world is fleeting and full of sorrow (*anityam, dukham*). It is not enough if you merely give your intellectual assent to this view. You must feel as a man would when he wakes up to find his house enveloped in flames. His only thought will be how to escape and save his life. When you attain to such a state of mind, you will be eager, anxious, and restless to find a way to permanent happiness and

freedom from this misery. As Edwin Arnold puts it: 'We are the voices of a wandering mind that moan for rest and rest we can never find.'

The present state is intolerable. If a way of deliverance or escape is placed before you, then alone the way of life becomes a live issue and reaches the domain of practical politics. If there is the least doubt about the possibility of our rising above the level of pleasure and pain, and other dualities, then the teaching of the Gita will not have any appeal. You remember the instance of a disciple in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. The disciple asked his teacher: 'Sir, please tell me how I can see God.' The Guru took the disciple to a lake and both of them got into the water. Suddenly the teacher pressed the disciple's head under the water. After a few moments he released him and the disciple raised his head and stood up. The Guru asked him, 'How did you feel?' The disciple said, 'Oh! I thought I should die; I was panting for breath.' The teacher said, 'When you feel like that for God, then you will know, you haven't long to wait for His vision.'

Arjuna was in exactly such a plight and was panting for a way of escape. In fact, the first half of this verse 38 is practically the teaching of the Gita. Arjuna is told '*Yogi bhava*'. Do you want to escape the duality which is another name for worldly life? Then you must go beyond them. How to do it? '*Be a Yogi*', exactly as the Gita asks you to do and walk along the path shown by the Lord.

> 'The wisdom of Sankhya has been declared unto thee. Hearken thou now to the wisdom of Yoga, endued with which, O! Son of Pritha, thou shalt break through the bonds of Karma.' (verse 39).

This verse seems to refer to two distinct views and methods. Controversies no doubt have been raging in advocating either of these as the best teaching. The Sankhya or Vedanta view described in verses 11-36 is mainly concerned about the ultimate nature of the truth. It is purely philosophical or metaphysical. Its goal is *Jñāna* or wisdom consisting of a vision and realization of the Absolute, which liberates the individual from the bonds of *Samsāra*. It has discrimination of the Eternal and the Non-eternal as the goal and meditation or contemplation as the *Sādhana* or discipline. The Yoga view on the other hand treats the individual as a man of action and teaches him how to attain a state of mental equipoise even through performance of his duties according to his station in life. Its goal also is to liberate him from the bonds of Karma or the wheel of *Samsāra* and its endless cycle of births and deaths. Only it is the more natural method as no one can escape work or activities altogether. But ultimately when he has reached his goal or the summit the two paths meet, merge and become identical. Both are different forms of Yoga only. The Sankhya and the Yoga referred to are ultimately one and the same. See verses 4 and 5 of the fifth chapter.

Arjuna was obsessed by the impending cruel and terrible slaughter of his own teachers and kith and kin. Therefore the Lord tells him that by the practice of this Yoga he could cast off the bonds of action. If you ever become a teacher, please remember to put your problem in a simple and clear language without introducing needless detail. You must arrest the attention of and arouse interest in your listeners. We find the Lord a perfect teacher.

The Sankhya speaks about the intellectual and philosophical aspect and the Yoga about the practical method

of attainment. The one is *Siddhānta* and the other is *Sādhana*. It does not matter in the least how you become a Yogi. You may follow *Jñāna Yoga* methods or *Bhakti Yoga* or *Karma Yoga*. The end and aim of all methods is to become a perfect Yogi, who remains unaffected by all pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain, etc.

The Sankhya emphasizes the eternal free immutable nature of the Atman. Bhakti Yoga lays stress on the Iswara or the Lord as the real power behind the machine that we call the universe and men as mere tools in His hands. Karma Yoga considers the universe as a mere play of nature with its three Gunas. So long as you have the vision that you are only an actor, it is natural to offer your duties as a sacrifice to the Lord. You may believe in any of these views according to your taste and temperament. Mere intellectual assent or talk about it will be of no avail in practical life. Recall what Sri Ramakrishna says: 'By drinking *siddhi*, one becomes intoxicated and feels happy. But supposing you have not eaten the stuff or done anything else with it, you simply sit down somewhere and mutter, "*Siddhi, siddhi*". Will that intoxicate you or make you happy?'

He also says: 'Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some again have tasted it. You feel happy when you see milk; you are nourished and strengthened when you drink it.' Verse 40 is meant to infuse good cheer, enthusiasm and courage in the disciple that is faint-hearted because of distance from the goal. The incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's and Sarada Devi's lives which I always draw upon produce in some persons a strange and curious reaction. Friends who listen to me often remark, 'Their ideal is too high for us. Everyone cannot become a Ramakrishna or a Sarada Devi.' You too often write in this strain. I would only repeat Sri

Ramakrishna's saying as the effective reply to such arguments. He says, 'If you proceed a few steps from Calcutta you are nearer Benares by so much. Also if we take one step towards God, He takes a hundred steps to come to us.' The Lord assures Arjuna that there is no room for fear, no question of loss of effort. Our struggle never goes in vain if the mind is kept steady and unruffled. The next verse (41) emphasizes the importance of the right attitude. It contrasts the ordinary man's mind constantly hankering after this, or that pleasure. It hints that lifting oneself above the level of gain and loss and other dualities alone gives that strength of will and singleness of purpose, which forms the basis of Yoga. From what follows it is patent that even the least taint of desire for fruits or rewards whatever be the nature of the act we perform is a source of bondage to be avoided scrupulously.

19. RISE ABOVE THE THREE GUNAS

Nistraigunyo bhava

The previous letter sufficiently and clearly indicates the way of escape from the bondage of action that is to lift our minds above the emotional level, the plane of desires. To emphasize the importance of keeping at a good distance every form of desire, the Gita points to a caution signal. The three verses 42 to 44 present a unique instance of controversy in the entire Gita. Nowhere else can we find the Lord disputing or controverting any school of thought or philosophy. On the other hand, 'By whatever paths or in whatever form or manner people worship me, I accept them all and everything comes to me ultimately,' is the refrain of the Song

Celestial (IV-11, VII-21 and IX-23). Even from the philosophical point of view Sankhya, Yoga and other systems—all are harmonized and nowhere disputed or disproved. He is concerned mainly with the right path and exhorts people to go ahead and not to stop for disputes till the goal is reached. Hence my difficulty to understand why and wherefore this *Vedavāda* comes for a good deal of castigation and is regarded as a serious menace. confess this remained a mystery to me for fifteen years. Gradually the mist cleared away and the truth as I see it seems to be this. The *Vedavāda* is not merely a metaphysical or philosophical point of view. Its whole appeal is to earthly and heavenly paradise and pleasures. It takes endless troubles to paint in bright colours what rite or ceremony will lead to which heaven. There are innumerable heavens, celestial spheres which are described in it as more and more attractive. It would appear that people gave free rein to their imagination and fancy and drew the crudest and most sensuous pictures of earthly enjoyments. Have you ever indulged in day dreaming while you were a little child? I remember very vividly how whenever I did not get sufficient sweets or playthings, I would imagine myself to be a prince owning a big palace filled with all sorts of attractive things, horses, sweets, servants, etc. If *Vedavāda* merely represented such childish fancies, it would not be harmful at all. But it was invested with all the authority of the Veda as philosophy and revealed religion. It was in a word a simple glorification of the senses. It taught the indulgence of the senses but not the way of escape from their enslaving thraldom. *Bhoga* or enjoyment in every sense of the term was the end and aim of the teachings of the *vedavādins*. They were more dangerous than open atheism. They taught there was no good other than *Bhoga*

(verse 42). Understand these verses in this light; and it follows simply and automatically that at the very outset such a warning is absolutely necessary.

It is sometimes contended that on attaining heaven through ritualism, the mind gets purified after sense enjoyment and the inevitable satiety of appetites and may become receptive for true Jnana or Bhakti. But the orthodox *Vedavāda* will not accept this apologia. It teaches that sensuous enjoyments are supreme ends in themselves. Whatever be the justification, the practical effects of this teaching on the vast majority of people is but to invest rank materialism and crude sensuality with sacerdotal prestige. There is an inherent dual aspect in man's nature, the higher and lower self, the latter running with the senses, mad after enjoyments while the former if awakened takes us on to freedom and eternal happiness. Do we not see all around us an unseemly rush for pleasures of all sorts? Ambition, lust and greed are whipping humanity to compete with one another and to crush the rivals in a fierce scramble for power and possessions. The last great war was but the latest demonstration of this brutal tendency in human nature. In line with this outlook was the huge ritual (*Yajña*) that was performed near your University at a fabulous cost of several lakhs of rupees. What huge crowds were attracted by the 'tamasha'! From the beginning of creation, time and again, the Lord has appeared and taught us the right path; but people forgot it easily deluded and ensnared by their insatiable desire for enjoyment. The Buddha's attempt at a later time seems to be but an echo of the Lord's teachings in the Gita. You find a striking illustration in the Daksho Prajapati episode in the Puranas. In verses 37 and 38, the Lord sets the ideal for Arjuna and humanity; the way to escape from

the bonds of Karma or the duality of sin and merit altogether, while the *Vedavāda* concerns itself wholly with the methods that yield the maximum of earthly enjoyment. The two teachings are as poles asunder. Once you are on the track of *Vedavāda* you cannot have singleness of purpose (*Vyavasātmika buddhi*), nor peace and perfect happiness. That is why in the next verse the Lord says that in this sense the Veda is confined within the ambit of the play of the three gunas of *Prkrti*. We are exhorted to cross this region, and rise above the play of gunas.

Traiguṇya vishayā vedā. What does this mean ?

The rituals enjoined by the Vedas fall into three broad divisions.

1. *Nitya* are those that must be performed by everyone. Omission of these rituals constitutes a positive sin whose consequence is suffering here and hereafter. Whether you like it or not, it is obligatory to perform them.

2. *Naimittika* are those occasioned by a *nimitta* or a cause or special reason, e.g. *Śrāddha* (funeral rites).

3. *Kāmya* are like optional subjects. If you like them you may undertake them and you will gain those definite results. But even with regard to these last, once you begin any such ritual, you must go through it to the very end with all care and attention, otherwise you will incur sin. Suppose you are elected the Honorary Secretary or Treasurer of your Union or Special Club. You have chosen to undertake this duty and you are not paid for it. If, after having undertaken the responsibilities, you do not call the meetings regularly, write down the minutes in due form, or submit the accounts periodically, you may be censured and rightly so, as if you committed an ordinary crime. The entire *Karmakānda* is

concerned with any one or other of these categories of works. Consequently, it is a bondage. The Lord asks Arjuna to be free from the three gunas. All these terms *Nirdvandva*, *Niryôgakshéma*, *Nitya satvastha*, and *Ātmavān* are simply amplification of the idea conveyed by *Nistraiguṇyo bhava*. The *dvandvam* is already explained. *Yôgakshéma* is perhaps the most pithy and expressive phrase to describe the ordinary man's whole concern and outlook in life. He wants to gain what he has not got (*Yoga*) and is anxious to preserve what he has obtained (*Kshéma*). I challenge you to state any concern of life which does not fall within these two categories. *Nitya satvastha* and *Ātmavān* just mean pitching your key high to the level of the eternal, serene and pure soul. You may impatiently ask, 'If *Yoga* and *Kshéma* are to be ignored, what else are we to do in life at all?' If you read further on, you will find a perfect answer in verse 47.

Verse 46 should not be taken literally or stretched beyond limit. This does not mean that if you realize the highest wisdom or *Jñāna*, you will know at the same time, differential calculus, astronomy, economics and all the arts or sciences, etc. But what this verse says is, 'your mind will attain perfect satisfaction, peace and blessedness and it will not feel the want for anything. Veda and ordinary knowledge give but temporary, partial or ordinary enjoyments, but the other is perfect and everlasting bliss.'

Recall Sri Ramakrishna saying, 'A person living on the bank of the Ganges does not dig a well for his drinking water. When the sun is shining brightly on the sky, there is no need for an ordinary lamp. No one needs a fan when the southern Malaya breeze blows sweetly.'

20. 'FOR WORK ALONE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT'

Karmaṇyévādhikārasté

Arjuna wants a definite lead or a specific direction. The Lord therefore gives the direction straightway

Karmaṇyévādhikārasté mā phaléshu kadācana
Mā karmaphalahéturbhūrmā té sangôstvakarmaṇi

'Your right is to work only, but never to the fruit thereof. Let not the fruit of action be your object, nor let your attachment be to inaction.'

This is an oft quoted verse. The words are very simple. It is also a terse formula which puts the central teaching in a nutshell. It is a text for meditation. It may take many lives to practise and reach perfection in realizing the full import and significance. At the outset it might appear impossible or at best a counsel of perfection. Two alternatives alone are open to you. To drift in life without any fixed goal or aim, like dumb driven cattle. No outward polish, fashion, style, splendour even is of any avail if the mind is not trained, purified and kept under control. The mind is everything. It makes a hell of heaven or a heaven of hell. People ask, 'Is not a worker entitled to his just wages? If a man toils from dawn to dusk and if you repeat to him this verse and send him home without wages, will the Lord send him, his wife and children cooked food and other necessaries?'

What is the meaning of the words 'never to the fruits thereof'. For the moment we shall digress from the Gita. You must have read Ruskin's *Crown of Wild Olive*. Listen to what he says on page 41. All healthy people like their dinners, but their dinner is not the main

object of their lives. So all healthy minded people like making money—ought to like it, and to enjoy the sensation of winning it, but the main object of their life is not money: it is something better than money. A good soldier, for instance, mainly wishes to do his fighting well. He is glad of his pay, very properly so, and justly grumbles when you keep him ten years without it. Still, his main notion of life is to win battles, not to be paid for winning them. So of clergymen. They like pew-rent and baptismal fees, of course; but yet, if they are brave and well educated, the pew-rent is not the sole object of their lives, and the baptismal fee is not the sole purpose of the baptism; the clergymen's object is essentially to baptize and preach, not to be paid for preaching. So of doctors. They like fees no doubt, ought to like them, yet if they are brave and well educated, the entire object of their lives is not fees. They on the whole desire to cure the sick; and if they are good doctors, and the choice were fairly put to them, would rather cure their patient and lose their fee than kill him and get it. And so with all other brave and right trained men; their work is first, their fee second—very important always but still second. But in every nation, as I said, there are a vast class who are ill-educated, cowardly and more stupid. And with those people, just as certainly the fee is first and the work second, as with the brave people work is first and the fee second. And this is no small distinction. It is between life and death in a man; between heaven and hell for him. You cannot serve two masters: you must serve one or other. If your work is first with you and your fee is second, work is your master, and the lord of work who is God. But if your fee is first with you, and your work is second, fee is your master, and the lord of fee who is the Devil; and

not only the Devil, but the lowest of devils, the 'least erected fiend that fell'. So there you have it in brief terms: work first—You are God's servant. Fee first—You are the Fiend's. And it makes the difference, now and ever, believe me, whether you serve Him Who has on His vesture and thigh written, 'King of kings', and whose service is perfect freedom; or him on whose vestures and thigh the name is written 'Slave of slaves', and whose service is perfect slavery.

If you read this entire letter through and through, you may get near the spirit of the verse. It is a question of which first and which second.

This is not a contradiction of the law of causation. You can never nullify it nor transcend it. In a material sense what you do will produce its effect. But in the mental plane you are a perfect master. You can defy the consequences, rise above or transcend them, or remain unaffected. You can do this only when the mind is fully under control, and it has become a mere tool in your hands. It must be your slave and not your master. But most of us are not masters but slaves of our mind and its large retinue. This is the root of all evil and misery in life. That is why the Lord is definite and categorical and asks Arjuna to do his duty and be done with it. This is not a mere reckless abandon to everything that comes. Your Dharma, your duty must be done. You cannot say, 'I do not want to do anything as I am advised not to be concerned with gain or loss.' This is equally bad. If one is avaricious, clinging, scheming and watching, ever running after this or that, it will not contribute to one's happiness. This attachment to fruits of action must be given up. Equally bad, or even worse, is a lethargic, dull, indifferent and cowardly passivity. This quietism is possible only in the outward or bodily sphere. But

the mind a hotbed of seeds or *samskāras* of desires is only biding its time to sprout the evil plants. Sri Ramakrishna very humourously likens the hidden mental desires to a group of monkeys sitting very quietly for a while but planning to jump at the next moment. So in the next verse (48) the Lord repeats his main advice to Arjuna, viz. *Yogi bhava* and asks him to do his duty being established in Yoga (*Yogasthah*).

In verse 49 the Lord has nothing but pity for those that act only when prompted by fruits (*Krpaṇāh phala-hetavah*). In verse 47 you have noticed that there are three negative commandments. Modern students hate the very idea of 'don'ts'. The natural reaction is revolt. Because you are asked not to do you think you must assert your right and do it. Children often exhibit this tendency. Perhaps these students feel that their self-respect and dignity are wounded. This is a mistaken notion. Students, as well as others, all wish to be happy all their lives. Nobody likes suffering or misery. How to secure happiness? It is wholly dependent upon your mental attitude and condition. This point is emphasized in verse 48.

Why is *Samatva* considered as the essence of Yoga? When our whole mind is concentrated in the discharge of our duties or the accomplishment of any work undertaken in the best manner possible, it inevitably follows that the sense of satisfaction will be full and complete. Whatever be the consequences, favourable and unfavourable, pleasant or otherwise, they will have no power to disturb the tranquillity. When a cup is full to the brim, whether you pour more liquid or not, its fulness is not affected. So the question reduces itself to this. When we begin or do any work where is our mind fixed? On the work or the consequences? If the former, the cup

of satisfaction is full. If the latter, it wants to be filled up and we cannot be sure of it beforehand. There are two things: 'the means' or the work that we do and 'the ends' or the goal, the results or the fruits of action. The Lord asks us to regard 'the means' as ends in themselves. When you concentrate on the means alone you do not require any other thing to give you full satisfaction. When we have made the means as the ends (*Siddhyasiddhyôh samôbhūtvā*) evenness in success and failure comes as a matter of course. Hence the attainment of this *Samatva* is defined in the verse as Yoga. You see that verse 48 puts the teaching of verse 47 in a more positive and direct form.

The two verses (49-50) constitute a pair which state in negative and positive form the supreme excellence of Yoga. Working with a view to gain is dull and mechanical, it never leads to peace and joy. This may be compared to the bull in the oil mill going round and round hoping to get at the fresh and green grass which is tied in front of it almost touching its very nose. The poor thing is unable to reach it because it is tied to the yoke. Pining for the results or fruits of our actions corresponds to the yoke. The fresh green grass is the peace and joy of the unattached work of the Yogi. So long as we are tied to the yoke of desire, the grass of peace eludes us.

The Lord commanded Arjuna to fight like a Yogi assuring him that this attitude alone will enable him to transcend the bondage resulting from both good and evil actions. This again is psychologically the most apt and perfect teaching, as Arjuna we found was obsessed with the fear of sin and the bondages of Karma. You cannot imagine a more terse, neat and beautiful phrase than '*Yogah karmasu kauśalam.*' (Yoga is dexterity in action.)

I am sure you will be reminded of Sri Ramakrishna's advice to smear your hands with the oil of devotion when cutting open the jack-fruit of *samsāra*. The sticky milk exudation is attachment to fruits or worldliness.

Verses 50 and 51 teach that *yoga yukta*, i.e. one who has mastered this pose of evenness and balanced state of mind, escapes even in this life all the bonds of good and evil action. Therefore this yoga is called skill or dexterity in action. He attains to that state of everlasting joy and bliss beyond all evil and misery.

21. THIS IS A DIVINE STATE

Éshā brāhmīsthitihi

Scientifically sceptical people always demand facts. Even the law courts require witnesses and proofs. Hence the rest of the chapter is devoted to a description of an ideal man or *Sthita prajña* with proofs and illustration.

The verses 52 and 53 describe a master who has attained eminence remaining so steady and unaffected by all that has happened or yet to happen in this world or the next. This eulogy pricks Arjuna's curiosity and he comes out with the questions in the following two verses.

Perhaps you have heard that in Mahatma Gandhi's Asram during every morning and evening prayers the verses 54-72 of this chapter are regularly recited It is obvious that the Mahatma considers these verses to contain the essence of the teaching of the Gita, and the description of the ideal or a perfect man. In fact his whole life is an experiment on this pattern. I believe he has written something to this effect in his *Anāsaktiyoga*. I mention this fact simply to prove that the ideal and

the teaching of the Gita is not just airy philosophy but a practical code of conduct to be translated into our everyday life and activities. It is not enough if we merely repeat it daily and regularly with devotion. The taste of the pudding is in the eating.

In verses 55-61 Arjuna learns of the requisites of true yoga, *Samatva, Buddhiyukta, Yogayukta, Yogasthah.* He naturally wants to know how it is manifest in actual practice and what difference it makes to the person, how it affects him, etc. In wonder and amazement Arjuna asks how such blessed souls are to be known and described, how they behave, talk, sit and move about. The answer is contained in these verses; it is simply a recapitulation of the advice given to him from verse 37 onwards and the philosophy underlying the advice in verses 11-36.

Verse 55 is a neat, brief and clear exposition of the substance of Yoga or mental discipline. What disturbs our mind and makes it as restless as a mad monkey is the never ending waves of desires. First and foremost, these waves must be stilled. You cannot suppress them on the surface. They have their roots and origin deep down. Do you know what homeopaths say regarding allopath's methods? The fevers and eruptions that allopaths seek to cure are according to homeopaths outward and superficial symptoms of a particular poison that has entered the system. Unless this poison is expelled, the symptoms will only change their shape and colour, the malady is suppressed not cured. So with these our desires and impulses. They must be completely given up, rooted out and eradicated. This is possible only when the soul finds perfect joy and happiness in itself. It desires nothing more, nothing less. It realizes its own real nature in this *Akhanda Saccidānandaṃ* (Infinite truth, knowledge

and bliss). The Yogi becomes *Ātmanyéva Ātmanā Tushṭah.* The self is fully satisfied in its own self.

You will notice that in verse 61 there occurs the phrase *matparah,* meaning devoted to 'me', to Lord Sri Krishna, God. This is the germ, the seed of the huge banian tree of Bhakti Yoga with innumerable branches which you will come across as we proceed. In a nutshell the *means* include the checking of the turbulent senses (*Vaśé hi yasyéndriyāṇi*), mastering them and keeping them under perfect control. Such a mastery of the senses is the *sine-qua-non* and true mark of real devotion. Compare the following: *Jahan Kam hai, tahan Ram nahi; Jahan Ram hai, tahan Kam nahi.* (Where there is desire there is no God. Where there is God, there is no desire.) Verses 62 and 63 give a masterly exposition of the whole psychology of emotion, will, desire, anger, feeling, etc. It may very well form a fit subject for a thesis for a doctorate. I will not spoil its beauty by adding anything of my own. The verses must be repeated and meditated upon. I would advise you to read Rajarishi Bharata's episode in the puranas.

All the verses that follow are simple and you will have no difficulty in grasping their import. The ideas are self-evident, and the words sweet and musical poetry. I love them and repeat them. I hope you may also learn to do so and derive real joy, solace and peace. When you read daily Sri Ramakrishna's sayings, his image and picture will often come to your mind. He is the living embodiment, commentary and proof of the verses 59-72.

Even Sri Ramakrishna has become more or less a mythological figure. His historicity is beyond doubt. His life incidents are cent per cent authenticated, being written by eye-witnesses. By mythological I mean you

can now meet very few persons who have actually seen him. Nevertheless, men who attained such divine state have never been completely lacking in our motherland. If it is permissible to mention living personalities, I shall name Mahatma Gandhi, Ramana Maharishi, (the sage of Thiruvannamalai) and Swami Ramadas of Kasargod. I single out these as I have had the good fortune to come into personal and close contact with the Mahatma, and have seen and talked to the other two great souls. Every moment of Mahatmaji's life is filled with momentous thought and problems. Where others would get distracted or completely swept away by feelings, Gandhiji can keep a complete control over his nerves. He not only feels peace within but also radiates it to others around. His bewitching smile is not a theatrical pose but an overflow of his inner calmness and joy. His penetrating insight or intuitive knowledge of many complicated and intricate problems, his boundless sympathy and love even for his opponents and enemies, if all these and similar traits in his character cannot convince you of the cent per cent practicability of becoming a true yogi, arguments will be mere waste of breath. His boundless faith in God and deep devotion are well-known. Yet, he always appeared to me as the model Karma Yogi, one who has mastered to a remarkable degree the Gita's teaching of 'dexterity in action'.

Of Ramana Maharishi you must have heard. A voluminous literature has already accumulated in various books about him. Whoever meets him, even for a moment, cannot fail to be struck with the fact that though he has a body and mind, even as you and I have, he moves and has his whole being on the plane of the Supreme Soul. The Sage of Arunachalla (Ramana Maharishi) is a typical and perfect Jnana Yogi.

Of Ramdas Swami, I cannot forget my first impression though several years have passed. He stands before one, his face and whole demeanour full of sweetness. I found him most lovable and childlike, with no trace of the 'little ego' in him. He is a Bhakta *par-excellence*. I wish you would take the earliest opportunity to have a darshan of these three great souls.

I have written to you freely about my personal impressions because you have yourself had the privilege and good fortune of meeting a few of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Though you are young, you find in them something so uplifting which you miss in all others. I cannot let go my impressions of my meeting with the Holy Mother. I have talked to you on several occasions about her but it is impossible to convey even a fraction of the joy and inspiration which every one derived on meeting her. Only one peculiarity I am going to mention here. She was a perfect combination and harmony of all the three types of yogic attainment, Karma, Jnana and Bhakti. Of Karma and Bhakti her life story contains many instances. That there was no lack of Jnanam in her may not be so very patent. Often there fell gems from her lips, gems of penetrating wisdom and of insight into the intricate mysteries and problems of life.

But for these living Yogis the Lord's teaching about Yoga and the divine state would perhaps have been treated as mere poetic fancy and imaginary patterns or ideals.

22. TO WORK IS BETTER THAN SHIRKING

Karmajyāyôhyakarmaṇah

Before we begin the third chapter let me say a few words in general. You might recollect that in a previous letter I mentioned the fact that the great Sri Sankaracharya begins his commentary on the Gita from chapter II, verse 11. He regards the verses 11-87 of that chapter as containing the central teaching of the Gita, the sublime Vedanta. You know by reading Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji that Adwaita (one of the three aspects of the Vedanta) is the philosophy of Sankara and his followers. It is the most impersonal philosophy ever known to the world. It satisfies the highest demands of reason. Its logic is perfect and matchless. It is the last word on Religion and Spirituality. It is a matter more for realization and actual experience, not for mere intellectual comprehension and reasoning. Sri Sankara's commentary on all that follows in the Gita is based on this system of thought. Everything is interpreted to subserve this teaching. The Bhagavadgita forms one of the three *Prasthāna trayas*. (Brahma Sutras, Upanishads and the Gita). Other great teachers also have written commentaries on these three scriptures supporting their particular and special systems. You have insisted from the beginning (to which I have readily agreed) that philosophical views or interpretations should not be brought into my letters. It is because of this that I have refrained from even referring to the aspects of the Vedanta as expounded by the different Acharyas. Indian Culture owes a debt to these Acharyas in general and the great Sankara in particular. He was the first and foremost Acharya successfully to stem the tide which threatened to engulf

all that is noble and sublime in the Vedic tradition or the Sanatana Dharma. Buddhism, Jainism, atheistic ritualism and other systems of thought might have swallowed the pure Vedic thought but for Sankara's labours. If the tradition had been lost, ancient Indian spiritual culture and thought might have become lost to humanity. When you feel so inclined, I would advise you to read the great Sankara's works. It is a source of spiritual inspiration and one of the several ways of attaining peace. His mastery of the Sanskrit language, his penetrating intellect, his merciless logic in refuting his opponents, all command our admiration. Whether you accept his particular teaching or not, you must pay due respect to the services he rendered to our glorious culture.

In my humble opinion the Bhagavadgita is not at all interested in the controversies of different schools of thought and the subtle distinctions in their systems of philosophy. Because it has been regarded as one of the *Prasthāna trayas* (Triad of Scriptures, or scriptural trinity), sectional controversies and commentaries are responsible for the simple and practical teaching of the Gita being shrouded in metaphysical technique and even lost in dialectic and sectarian arguments. The Gita, however, with a rare impartiality presses into service all the various philosophical views and ideas current at the time, takes them in their broad general sense and sometimes even amplifies their import and application. The main reason for this attitude is its predominant practical and realistic outlook. The typical disciple Arjuna is a man of action. He is puzzled as to what he should do. He wants a clear lead, and to be told in one word what he is to do and what not.

The opening verses of the third chapter, I therefore regard, as a clever literary device to reconcile the

different views (theoretical or metaphysical and practical or devotional). It emphasizes the supreme importance of purifying one's mind, controlling the senses and becoming established in a perfectly serene state. In fact you must act and live in the world. The logic of facts, the hard realities of life cannot be whistled away by a mere philosophy and high sounding phrases. They have to be faced squarely and duty must be done calmly and bravely. To do our duties is far superior to abandoning them or running away from them.

Verses 4 to 8 state simply what is a matter of ordinary experience. Nature whips, goads and drives all to activity. Not even for a second can we sit idle. Whether through our mind or through the sense organs or through both, activity is going on. For some lethargic natures, it is possible to remain seemingly quiet but it is only hypocrisy as such persons usually have no control over their minds. As the proverb has it 'Satan finds some mischief for the idle hands to do'.

It is impossible to bring the mind under control and enjoy perfect rest and peace in inactivity. The problem of problems therefore is how to act and live in the world and at the same time escape being caught in the meshes of *Samsāra*. So the Lord advises everyone to do his own allotted work, for even the sustenance of one's body is not possible without activity of some kind. It is obvious that work is superior to idleness or inaction. Work includes the selfish or wrong type of activity. This must be avoided at all cost. The most ancient conception of *Yajña* is pressed into service here to teach the right type. With primitive minds this sacrifice is undertaken out of fear and crude motives. The gods were believed to be angry and had to be appeased with sacrificial offering of the blood of animals, birds, perhaps as a

substitute for offering one's own self, one's children or kith and kin. The gods had also to be flattered with praises and special offerings during festival occasions. This crude idea or primitive ritualism had undergone several modifications. The Gita sublimates it into a grand ideal—by making the general welfare of all humanity as the ultimate goal of all sacrifices.

The creator when he created the universe gave to men *Yajña* (sacrifice) as the milch cow for the attainment of every kind of human happiness and the propagation of his species. The gods and men are regarded as forming part of a unitary system and designed to live and work for mutual benefit. If you read all these stripped of their local or temporal colour or the symbology of Vedic rituals, you will find here the ideas of a super (or spiritual) socialism. There is no question of classes and masses, capital and labour and all that you are familiar with in the modern materialistic conceptions of socialism. It is not the privileges so much as the rights and duties of man that are emphasized. Every man is to live in this world not for this or that pleasure or gain or any material comfort for himself but only to serve the ultimate principle of creation and the solidarity of the race. His whole life is to be a dedication and a sacrifice. Whatever is enjoyed he enjoys it as a remnant of this sacrifice, or in other words as *prasādam* of consecrated offering. His selfish satisfaction does not figure here at all. That is why such a person escapes sin altogether. On the other hand when the self-centred person who lives, works for and aims exclusively at his own personal satisfaction (which is often at the expense of others—verse 13), when such a person enjoys and eats, he is verily said to *eat* sin.

The man who does not give the due share to the Devas, i.e. the welfare of the creation, he is declared

verily a thief (12). Here is much food for reflection for you modern votaries of socialism. It does not matter what label you fix, Communism, Bolshevism, Marxism or any other 'isms'. Analyse the motives that inspire the votaries of this gospel. You will find that it originates from the hatred of the class or group of persons who are called exploiters, capitalists, or privileged people and aims ultimately at the satisfaction of some other class no doubt numerically much larger. To achieve this ideal the leaders or promoters have no scruple whatsoever to crush under foot or even murder in cold blood thousands or millions of their fellow-men. The end justifies the means for them. The colossal scale on which the unscrupulous few exploit the millions of unfortunate men and women does seem to justify anything that will end this intolerable evil. But there is such a thing as a moral law. This cannot be cheated or hoodwinked. Hatred and violence will only breed more hatred and violence. Two wrongs do not cancel out to make one right. I know that it is difficult to get even a patient hearing from modern young students for any basic, radical and thorough examination of the ultimate nature and drift of socialism. Anyhow, as I said before, there is food for reflection in the Gita view of life as a dedication or sacrifice that we are actively to promote, and work primarily for, the well being of the entire race and only incidentally for our own pleasures, comforts and happiness. Humanity first and ourselves next. Duty first, pleasures afterwards. This is one definite teaching of the Gita—that we should perform all work as a *Yajña* or sacrifice, i.e. ultimately the same thing as '*Being a Yogi.*' Would to God if this spiritual or true socialism were to gain votaries in large numbers from the ranks of modern youth, humanity would rise to undreamt of

perfection and happiness and the Kingdom of Heaven (or as Gandhiji calls it Ramarajya) will be established on earth.

The Lord cites the example of Janaka, other saintly kings (rajarishis) and also of his own life. Janaka figures in the Vedas. He is a favourite disciple of Sage Yajnyavalkya. He comes in the Ramayana as the father of Sita. His name occurs often in the Mahabharata. He is described as the Guru of Sukadeva, the son of Vyasa. He figures very prominently in the Yogavasishta and in fact in every purana. Many modern people claim to be a Janaka or at least to follow his example. He is a model for all *jñānis* and also for the householders. Janaka was a ruler and had all the comforts and luxuries of a king no doubt, but he is described as one who had not a trace of egoism. He lived and worked day and night for the welfare of his subjects and for the welfare of the entire human race. An incident in the life of Janaka brings out this point. Yajnyavalkya was teaching Janaka and his other Sanyasin and Brahmin disciples. He often found that the king alone was able to catch and rise up to the true spirit of his teaching, which was to do one's duties free from egoism, to work and yet not become attached. The king, though he performed meticulously all the multitudinous duties pertaining to his office, was completely unattached to the fruits of his action. On the other hand the other disciples who had externally renounced their poor worldly possessions had not in truth given up their little narrow selves. The teacher was naturally fond of this apt pupil and took pains to satisfy all his doubts and queries in every way. The others became very jealous and thought wrongly that the teacher was partial to Janaka because he was the king. One day a courier came panting to say that Mithila, Janaka's

capital, was in flames. Immediately all the disciples, except the King, ran to their cottages to save their *kamandalas* and loin cloths. But they were informed on the way that it was a mere hoax. When they returned they found the teacher and Janaka continuing the discourse as if nothing had happened. When questioned by the teacher why Janaka did not move, he replied in the famous saying, *Mithilāyām pradagdhāyām namékincit praṇaśyati*. Even though Mithila may be consumed to ashes, I lose nothing. The other disciples were ashamed at their own petty-mindedness and attachment to their poor belongings.

Lest the disciple should remain still unconvinced the Lord puts his own example before Arjuna in verse 22. This is the first time when Sri Krishna refers to Himself and hints about His descent into man as an Avatara. The why and wherefore of this descent is adverted to again in the next chapter. It is enough here to note what He states to be the motive for His action. In all the three worlds there is nothing which is worthy of being sought after by Him. Yet why is He engaged in a ceaseless activity? Because if He remains quiet and passive and not doing the duties pertaining to His station the world will follow His example. This will lead to confusion and there will be great harm to society, for whatever example the great ones set, that becomes the rule, model and tradition for others to follow (verse 21).

Even those who have attained perfect wisdom and have become freed from all bondages, here and hereafter, perform work like ordinary men. The difference is only this. The latter (ignorant) perform work with attachment. The wise act without any attachment, thus helping to sustain the solidarity of the human race. They believe they ought not to disturb the minds of those who through ignorance are attached to fruits in all their activities in life.

23. KILL THE ENEMY DESIRE

Jahi śatrum kāmarūpam

It is necessary to know the exact nature of all human action. The entire life activity has got an aspect which is not realized in the dust and heat of the world. *Prakṛti* or Nature with its three Gunas is the real agent or author of all our activities. Failing to appreciate or realize fully this, the true nature of all human action, men think that they are the real agents or doers in their own right. Those who are cognizant of the nature of *Prakṛti*, the gunas, modes and their true function, remain as spectators and witness with detachment the play of the senses, their objects and all the paraphernalia of the mind and body based on the three gunas. They do not themselves become attached to or identified with this play of nature.

In verse 30, the entire creation, all the phenomena of life, the various incidents and actions that interest us so much as historical events are all treated as mere play or display of *Prakṛti* with her three gunas. This is the essence of the Sankhya philosophy. Other systems of thought also accept this more or less. We may be quite convinced intellectually that everything is but a play of the gunas and does not affect the ultimate nature of the true self. This mere intellectual comprehension or even conviction is not sufficiently powerful to help us in active life. The psychic and emotional reactions of the play of the gunas are so strong and powerful that we are simply swept away or carried along the current in spite of our philosophic beliefs or convictions. What is really wanted is a powerful lever to lift our mind or Self, so to say, from this quagmire of feeling, desires and impulses and give us that peace and balance of mind which

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Such an attitude is comparable to that of a person waiting to bathe in the ocean after all the waves are stilled!

When any desire is denied, it gives birth to anger. Anger is notoriously wicked and sinful. It deludes one. In literature you meet with the expression 'He was blind with rage.' That is why it is enormously evil (*mahāpāpam*). These two, lust and anger, therefore are our real enemies. The problem is how to conquer our internal and external foes. We must be familiar with the delicate network of mental machinery involved in this occurrence. Indian psychologists recognize five stages of human sensibility: the gross body, the subtle senses (*indriyas*), the mind (*manas*), the intellect or discriminative faculty (*buddhi*), and finally the soul (*ātman*). The series is in the ascending order of superiority, purity and power. Arjuna is advised to control the senses at the very outset. Desire as expressed in the outward form is a tertiary stage of the seed or thought (chap. II, verse 62). It is not possible for everyone to dive deep to the very bottom of our minds and kill the disturbance before it comes to the surface as a ripple or a bubble. Such an ability presupposes great alertness and extraordinary powers of control over the senses. To most of us all that is possible is only control of the gross senses and preventing their running after their objects. Practice of such a control will ultimately lead to the inner control of the thought forms. Hence the supreme importance of *japam* (meditation), and ceremonial worship. All these have only one end in view. We are all slaves of our mind and desires. This leads to endless misery. We have to bring the mind under our control and make it our willing instrument. Please note that the desires are described as *mahāśanah* (insatiable), *mahāpāpam* (a great evil).

This is not merely a literary device or fondness for repetition. If we are to succeed in following the central teaching '*Yogi bhava*' this control of the senses and mind or desires generally is most vital, the essential and preliminary step and no emphasis on or repetition of this fact is redundant. It is exactly the one thing which you wiseacres of the University ignore. Open your eyes and realize all the implications. As the proverb says: 'If you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind.' The advice boils down to this in practice. You are the master or arbiter of your own fate. You can make life a bed of roses or one full of thorns. The trick lies in holding the reins tight and controlling the wild, turbulent, spirited horses of your senses and desires.

In the last verse of this chapter, Arjuna is asked to rouse his higher and nobler self, the pure atman which is usually dorment below the surface of the turbulent senses. Recall Sri Ramakrishna's fond song '*Jago jago kula kundalini*'.

This *kundalini*, the six *chakras* and the elaborate system of rites and processes which are fully described in Tantric literature constitute both the science and art of mental training, control and culture. For this and other methods of yogic culture I would advise you to study one or two select books on the subject. We owe to Sir J. Woodroffe a debt of gratitude for valuable translations of many important works of the former category. For the latter Swami Vivekananda's *Rajayoga* will give you sufficient guidance.

24. I AM BORN FROM AGE TO AGE

Sambhavāmi Yugé Yugé

In this (IV) chapter, in fact from now onwards, Sri Krishna assumes a different role. Arjuna knew him as his own cousin, a very good friend, jolly and resourceful, ever ready to help him. In the beginning of the second chapter we find him addressing Sri Krishna as a teacher or guru, taking shelter under his feet and ready to be advised and taught his supreme duty. In the third chapter, after setting before Arjuna the example of Janaka and others, he cites his own life as a model for men to follow. He says that he acts and does Karma only for the sake of humanity and that he has nothing to gain or to attain in all the three worlds. In chapter II, verses 30 to 32 give a clear indication of his Divine aspect. In this chapter we find not a mere indication but a definite declaration of his advent as an avatar or his descent as a man; and it is introduced very naturally.

This eternal Yoga of the Gita was taught by Sri Krishna to Vivaswan who taught it to Manu and Manu to Ikshwaku and so on from generation to generation. But as it happens with everything in the world, the tradition was lost, engulfed in the all-devouring jaws of Time. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna: 'This very Yoga, the noblest and highest truth has this day been declared unto you as you are my friend and devotee.' Arjuna mystified asks him how Krishna, born much later than Vivaswan, Manu and others, taught them in the very beginning. Sri Krishna's reply is the declaration, the most famous and sublime, the why and the wherefore of the avatar. The verses 6, 7 and 8 are not only most oft quoted but also state in a simple and profound way the *Avatāra Vāda*.

You have read the life of Sri Ramakrishna. The idea of avatar or the descent of God into man presents you no difficulties. It is no puzzle, rather it seems so very natural. To many modern *westernized* men and women an incarnation is unscientific, and a tall order on human credulity. Some even go to the length of saying that it is the invention of some clever and unscrupulous people to exploit the poor and gullible masses. We shall not enter into the philosophical aspect of this question. I am sure your friends often dispute and question your own belief in incarnation. Sri Ramakrishna in his own simple way gives his explanation. In a zemindari if there is serious trouble anywhere the Diwan must personally go to the spot to smoothen matters. This he will have to do as often as there is trouble. This world is my Divine Mother's zemindari. With regard to the distribution, nature and capacity of the avatars and other freed and perfected men he introduces the simile of a log of wood, a boat and a steamer. The first can take only one man across a river, the second half a dozen or a dozen, but in the third, the steamer, thousands of people cross to the other shore. The avatar can by a mere sight, touch, or wish transmit spiritual power. This has been experienced and proved beyond doubt by every disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The avatars could, at their will, play the human or the Divine role alternately. They could as easily pass from one to the other as we pass from one room to another. They are inexhaustible and perennial fountains of grace, love and mercy. Their spirit lives and works in the world as a spiritual dynamo even long after their disappearance from the physical body. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, they have no freedom or *mukti* as in the case of ordinary men. Their birth or advent is also due to quite other reasons than is the case with

ordinary people. They come because they have to set Dharma on the right footing, to teach humanity what is most precious but forgotten. They fulfil their missions in different ways according to different advents. The differences are only apparent and in form only, just to meet the special needs of the time. All the problems relating to the advent of God have become so familiar and self-evident especially after the advent of Sri Ramakrishna.

The stories of other avatars have been enshrouded in dark mysteries. Marvels and miracles surround the avatars. Their human aspect has been suppressed by partisans, blind with bigotry, possibly out of an ignorant belief that any such admission militates against the Divine glory. With the march of time, this mystery and miracle grows in volume like a snowball. This is not to be wondered at. See how even a simple event is handled by an imaginative and resourceful war correspondent.

Perhaps the most simple and natural explanation for the necessity of avatars is the one given by Swami Vivekanandaji. He says: 'No man can see God but through these human manifestations. Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God but as a man.'

Fortunately for us and future humanity all the human elements in Sri Ramakrishna's life are fully recorded and preserved intact. Swami Saradananda in his *Leela-prasanga* (a unique biography of the Master) has taken special pains not to omit even the tiniest incident in the life of Sri Ramakrishna which reveals the human aspect of the great Master.

We may now proceed to consider the verses in detail. Verses 1 to 4 present no difficulty. Arjuna does not remember his previous births which are many. But

the Lord knows and remembers them all. This memory, or the knowledge of previous births, comes to yogins after a certain level of attainment. It is called *Jātismaratva*. Yogasutra of Patanjali and even Sankhya have all got something interesting to say on this point. We shall look to only Sri Ramakrishna to throw light on these subtle and deep mysteries. You remember what he says about himself. To the modern, sceptical and rationalistic mind of Swami Vivekananda again and again Sri Ramakrishna gave irrefutable proofs of his avatarhood. In answer to the unexpressed doubt in Swamiji's mind, Sri Ramakrishna on his death-bed declared: 'He who was Rama and Krishna, is now Ramakrishna in this body—but not in your Vedantic sense!'

We need not dispute those who refuse to be convinced. Hindu scriptures take avatar for granted. It gives peace, solace and satisfaction to millions and millions of people. Pragmatically it is self-evident and does not need any proof. How this avatar is accomplished in actual practice is described by the Lord himself in verse 6:

> 'Though I am unborn and my nature is eternal, and though I am the Lord of all creatures, I employ Nature which is my own, and take birth through my Divine Power.'

This is the *modus operandi* of how God becomes a man, yet does not cease to be God altogether.

There are two ways of understanding this question. Among men we find some that are worse than brutes; most of us are ordinary souls, but a few are so altruistic, so pure and so full of love that they instantaneously command the respect and veneration of their fellows. A Mahatma Gandhi is worshipped by millions of people. Mahatma Gandhi's own explanation in this connexion

is very interesting. In his *Anāsakti Yoga* he observes, (I am giving a free translation): 'An avatar indicates an embodied Extraordinary Person. All beings are avatars of God. But in ordinary language we do not call everybody an avatar. The person who is the most religious (*Dharmavān*) of the age is worshipped by the coming generations as an avatar. I see no harm in this. It entails no dimunition in the greatness of God, nor is it in any way prejudicial to truth. "Man is not God, but man is not different from the effulgence of God either." (*Ādam khudā nahīn lékin khudāké nūrsé ādam judé nahīn.*) One in whom the sense of religion is most awake in a particular age is an avatar. Viewed in this light, Sri Krishna as a perfect avatar occupies the supreme place in the Hindu Religion.'

Verse 6 in ordinary language means this; God in ultimate nature never undergoes any real change or suffers dimunition. He is not even born. You and I are born not out of our own free choice. We have to, being determined and driven by our past Karma. But the Lord is the supreme ruler of all beings. He moves and sustains them. Yet He chooses out of His own free will to be born like ordinary men. He merely utilizes *Prakṛti* which is His own nature (*Śakti*) as a vehicle for the purpose. He is the Lord of *Māyā* or *Māyādīśa*, while all of us are under the sway or jurisdiction of *Māyā* or *Māyādhīna*. The Lord can take any form He likes, Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-lion, Dwarf and so forth. As He explains, this is done by His own Divine nature. Although He appears and acts like a beast or a man, He is not deluded at any time like ordinary mortals. Recall Sri Ramakrishna's explanation that the serpent (cobra) has the venomous poison always in its body. The poison does not affect the cobra but it is death to others. So the

Prakṛti or Nature does not bind or affect the Lord although its quality remains the same. This verse explains how the supreme Lord of all beings comes to be born as an ordinary man while the next two verses explain the occasion and purpose of His advent or avatar.

You might have heard the two verses (7, 8) hundreds of times. Every Bhagavata will quote these in his introduction. All pandits press these into service in their religious discourses. Politicians even have not spared these. You might have heard platform orators describing vividly that the present is the most critical period and even things of a trifling nature will have very momentous consequences for the future. Every little thing a boy or girl is called upon to do would determine the fate of the country for thousands of years. I have been hearing such stirring orations even from my school days. I used to think that the advent of an avatar in terms of this verse was imminent. Now I do not feel so sure. Avatars do not come daily. They are not interested in our political, social and economic crises. Verse 7 clearly and categorically lays down that whensoever *Dharma* declines and *Adharma* is on the ascendant the Lord descends and takes a human body. This *Dharma*, and *Adharma* are very intricate, ticklish words almost impossible to translate into English. In Sanskrit they have a very very comprehensive significance or connotation, having innumerable shades of meanings.

What is *Dharma*? It has been declared: *Ahimsā Paramô Dharma*. (The supreme *dharma* is non-violence.) *Satyaméva jayaté nānṛtam*. (Truth alone conquers, never untruth.) In other words Right is Might but not the other way. Worship of God is *dharma*, Worship of Mammon is *adharma*. This mammon worship is the root cause of all violence, the source and harbinger of all evils. Bhishma's

reply to Draupadi's query about Dharma in the Mahabharata is interesting. I would ask you to read it yourself.

Every one will have his special and peculiar views. Sometimes you will find scores of avatars with competing claims. The Lord alone can settle this point for He alone knows the full facts of the case. He comes out of His own free will and chooses His own time, place and manner of coming. Even when He actually comes, very few recognize Him as an avatar. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that in the Rama Avatar only seven rishis could recognize him as an avatar. You will find parallels in the case of Sri Krishna. Duryodhana ridicules or poohpoohs Sri Krishna's *Vibhūti* as mere jugglery. Even Arjuna knew him only as a friend in need and deed. As you will see in chapter XI the cosmic vision of the Lord or *Viśvarūpa Darśana* terrifies Arjuna and he is at his wit's end to understand the vision. Only when the Lord was graciously pleased to grant him the Divine eye (supersensuous vision) (XI-8) was Arjuna able to catch just a glimpse. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find the same story repeated once again. Very few could realize that he was an avatar. Verse 8 requires no further comments. Who is a *Sādhu* (virtuous person), who a *dushkṛta* (wicked person) you yourself must be able to answer after reading chapter XVI.

The next two verses (9 and 10) form an eulogy of the Avatar. Only those who are freed from desire, fear and anger and are established in right wisdom can understand the secret of avatar. Those who know this attain freedom from all bondages and become one with the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna often insists that one cannot realize God so long as *lajjā, ghrena, bhaya* (the sense of shyness or aversion, contempt and fear) are present in

one. When I was revising these letters I came across the following very interesting quotation from Aldous Huxley's Introduction to the Bhagavadgita translated by Swami Prabhavananda. Aldous Huxley is no orthodox Brahmin or a Pandit. His name is well-known to the University students in this country as well. He says:

'..... most statements of the Perennial philosophy have included another doctrine affirming the existence of one or more human Incarnations of the Divine Ground, by whose mediation and grace the worshipper is helped to achieve his goal—that unitive knowledge of the Godhead, which is man's eternal life and beatitude. The Bhagavadgita is one such statement. Here Krishna is an incarnation of the Divine Ground in human form. Similarly, in Christian and Buddhist Theology, Jesus and Gautama are incarnations of Divinity. The Godhead is possible (and is regarded as having in fact taken place); for Christians there has been and can be only one.

'An incarnation of the Godhead, and, to a lesser degree any theocentric saint, sage or prophet, is a human being who knows who he is and can therefore effectively remind other human beings of what they have allowed themselves to forget, namely, that if they choose to become what potentially they already are, they too can be eternally united with the Divine Ground.

'Worship of the Incarnation and contemplation of his attributes are for most men and women the best preparation for the unitive knowledge of the Godhead.'—*Gita* by S. Prabhavananda, pp.14-15.

25. WHAT IS 'ACTION' AND WHAT IS 'INACTION'

Kim karma, kimakarma

Avatars are many. We are at liberty to choose any one for worship. The most important thing is however worship of the *Ishṭam* or chosen deity in a right spirit. Verse 11 is liberal in outlook and affords full scope and play for every variety of nature and temperament. You may worship God without form or with form, in images, in the sun, sky, rivers, forests or even in the human form. Some worship even cows. The form does not matter. What matters is true worship. Is it forgetting oneself, denying oneself and offering oneself gladly and willingly as a sacrifice? This is and ought to be the meaning of true worship, and such worship is pleasing to God and He accepts it gladly. This and similar verses in the Gita ought to be printed in golden letters. They ought to find a place in every school, hostel, road, temple and bathing ghat. If the spirit of the verse is imbibed by our people would there be Hindu-Muslim riots and disputes about music before mosques, etc? Hindu-Muslim unity could be achieved more easily and quickly by preaching this verse rather than by conferences. The truth is, the so-called communal fights have nothing to do with Religion. Various interested people and parties simply exploit religion for their own selfish purposes. This is the truth. This is the only true answer I can give to your repeated complaints against our religion leading to such troubles. This verse in the Gita categorically, unequivocally declares that every form of worship is pleasing to God. How can you drag in Religion as the cause for the foolish quarrels that break out like epidemics in our motherland!

Verse 12 might puzzle you and the modern youth. It is possible to argue that if one works strenuously and sincerely he would get the proper results whether he sacrifices to any God or not. No work, no wages; no pains, no gains. Every man is worth his wages. What is the need for Indra, or Varuna to intervene and play the role of a broker or middleman? Imagine you have scored a goal in a football match; but unless the referee's whistle puts the stamp of approval it is not strictly a goal and no action could take place on it until such an approval is officially forthcoming. In some such light you must understand the part played by the various gods in the acceptance and reward of fruits.

This verse is a re-echo of the *Vedavāda*. It is also related to the next verse which speaks about the four castes and their respective duties. This *Varṇāśrama dharma* is in a sense a peculiarity of our socio-religious system. It is better reserved for a future occasion.

The terms *yajña* and *siddhi* have a special colour and significance entirely depending upon the age and particular outlook of man.

The first half of verse 13 explains further the role of the avatar and how he establishes the Dharma and how the different classes and orders in society could work smoothly in co-operation and harmony. This verse lends itself to endless controversy, whether the caste is to be determined by birth and heredity or by quality and occupation (*guna* and *karma*). Perhaps the truth lies between these two extremes. I would only say, much can be said for both the sides. Birth and heredity contribute something and help to some extent. Training, environment, occupation or practice can effect very material changes. To emphasize the one ignoring the other leads to terrible confusion and havoc in society.

You may recollect Swami Vivekananda's ideal that everyone should be raised to Brahminhood. You should not drag the Brahmin down. Impatience is to be avoided. The higher caste must also live up to the high ideals and help those below. As you are familiar with Swamiji's view on this subject I need not labour this point further.

The second half of the verse continues the thread of the main teaching of the Gita, viz. 'To work and yet not get attached.' The Lord citing his own example declares, 'actions do not taint me, because I have no craving for fruits of action.' Those that know this truth do not get bound by action. The word in the text is *abhijānāti* (knows). It does not mean a merely intellectual comprehension. Knowing here is realizing and acting in full consonance with that knowledge. The next verse (15) is very simple. Arjuna is advised to follow the tradition and example of the ancient wise men before him.

Next follows a further elucidation of the doctrine of performing action (*karma*) without attachment. Even very wise men get bewildered in determining what is 'action' and 'inaction'. The right and correct understanding is stated in verse 18. I confess I was simply puzzled by the first half of this verse. At first I was unable to understand the words 'action in inaction'. In order to make sense we have to understand that 'action' means that work or activity which binds and 'inaction' is that which does not. Sri Ramakrishna's life throws some light. Do we not find him always engaged in ceaseless activity and even giving his very life, so to say, to all that came to him? He did not mind his body or comfort. This we find him doing up to the last moment of his life. Yet all along his mind is in *Samādhi* or a Superconscious state, or 'inactive', i.e. not being attached in any manner to anything which might lead to bondage.

His life was a model example of 'inaction' in 'action'. You can find everywhere examples of 'action' in 'inaction'. Closing our eyes and remaining idle with folded hands do not constitute 'inaction'. The mind is ever wandering restlessly from one thought to another.

The verses that follow (19-22) elucidate this ideal. You might feel puzzled how one could ever act without any motive, without any expectation of fruits or results and how, if one comes to act at all in this way, could one escape the bondages of the world. How can the fire of wisdom burn away all the evil in Karma? In the first place you must realize that it is the fire of wisdom (*jñāna agni*) not mere intellectual comprehension. We understand many things intellectually but the difficulty arises because of our inability to translate this understanding into effective action. The next verse declares how a person lives and acts possessed of this wisdom (*jñāna*). Note the terms *nityatṛptāh* (ever content or satisfied with himself and what comes to him by chance), in verse 20, and *yadṛcchālābhasantushṭah* in verse 22. We lack these very two qualities and hence all our suffering. We get bound. We are born again and again. But reverse the condition. Do not expect anything. Let your mind be always serene, come what may. Be active and doing whatever comes in your way. Then you have learnt the secret of Yoga. This is so simple and yet so few of us attain to it. You must bear in mind the fact that until you master the trick in any game it appears hopeless or impossible. You see others doing a thing. You try but fail several times. This does not dishearten you. You try and try again. Lo! you get it and then it becomes so simple and natural. You wonder at your own nervousness in the beginning. The same thing has to be practised in this bigger game of life. You may fail even

a million times. Try, try till you get it. This is why the Lord repeats the central teaching in innumerable ways and forms.

26. THE MAN OF FAITH ATTAINS KNOWLEDGE

Śraddhāvān labhaté jñānam

The best way of doing all work is the problem again taken up.

Verse 23 suggests that we should perform every work as a sacrifice (*Yajña*) in order to escape from bondage. Verse 24 is the most familiar one. You hear it repeated in all our asramas at the time when the devotees partake of *prasādam*. If even our eating could be raised to this high level of a sacrifice what to speak of other activities? Your study, your games and every little act of your daily life must be raised to the level of a sacred and divine worship or sacrifice.

Verses 25 to 32 describe various forms of *yajña* or sacrifice and verse 33 sums up and says that we find the consummation of all works in wisdom or *jñāna*. The explanation is simple. Worldly men do all work for their own selfish pleasures and enjoyment and therefore get caught. With the dawn of wisdom there will be no ideas of 'doership', expectation or selfish satisfaction, but only the calm and peace of discharging one's duties and serving humanity.

Verse 34 may perplex some of your friends. You yourself will have no difficulty in appreciating the supreme value of taking shelter under the Guru or serving him in all possible ways including little menial acts and laying your doubts before him with an earnest,

sincere and receptive heart. Then the wise and loving teacher tells you all. You have a direct, personal experience of this and so I need not labour this point any further. I might in passing observe that the truth contained in this verse is the solid rock on which alone a true, lasting and beneficial system of education can be built. Our ancient gurukula systems supplied this in every detail. The modern system stands in glaring contrast to the old.

In the old days the students became members of the teacher's family. For twelve years or so they forgot their families and did not know any other home. In the gurukula the king's son and the poor Brahmin's son were all treated alike. By turns each had to take his part in every form of service, such as bringing firewood, attending upon the guru rendering personal services to him, going out for the daily rounds of Bhiksha and so on. The bond between the teacher and pupil was one of gentle love and affection from one side and deep respect and veneration from the other. There were few formal lectures and the teacher's life was the most eloquent sermon. Example rather than precept, practice rather than theoretical discussions were the rule and order. Will such a system of education ever return? Not in outward form and detail certainly. The spirit at least ought to be brought in.

The next verse (35) speaks not about secular or worldly knowledge but about the highest wisdom knowing which everything is known. All doubts are for ever destroyed and you will realize the entire universe and God in you and everything in God. This, the highest ideal of *jñāna* or wisdom, is the same for all schools of thought and philosophy of course with minor differences. They may describe the same in different words and

prescribe different methods of discipline but the goal is the same.

The next two verses constitute an eulogy of this *jñānam* or wisdom. They describe its omnipotence, its power to destroy all sin and the bondage of Karma. Therefore the Lord says in the next verse (38) that there is nothing so pure and beneficent as this.

The rest of the verses deal with the *sine-qua-non* of this attainment and what militates against this. The two essential conditions are one *śraddhā* or faith and the other self-control. This *śraddhā* is a very important element in all Indian teachings. Without this you can never practise any discipline. *Śraddhā* or faith has different degrees or stages. You may recall how Swami Vivekananda twitted his Master about blind faith. The Master as usual came out with his ready repartee. He asked Swamiji to describe any faith which has eyes as opposed to blind faith. Faith is faith. There is no blindness or otherwise in it. Faith is different from logical reasoning. It is not certainly sentimental credulity or gullibility. It is not reached by calculation. It is a sort of intuition. It comes only when the mind is pure and free from all passions or agitation. You come into the presence of a holy person and you feel in your heart of hearts that there is a genuine ring in his words. The words may be very, very simple. Yet they make an impression which goes straight to the heart; all doubts vanish like darkness before the sun. You have such an experience from meeting your guru.

There is another aspect. This faith when it becomes perfect is the same as the highest wisdom. It is also the purest devotion or the perfection of Yoga. In this state of illumination or exaltation all doubts are destroyed. Such a perfection does not come easily or in the

beginning. In the scientific method there is such a thing as the inductive process of hypothesis and experimental verification. You frame such a one and proceed to test it by experiment. In the spiritual world *śraddhā* corresponds to the working hypothesis. Here also you experiment and the consequences or the results constitute the proof. They also intensify the faith. We cannot begin any spiritual discipline if we do not have even a modicum of faith or *śraddhā*. Doubt (*samśaya*), unbelief (*aśraddhā*) are positively evil and fatal. That is why in verse 40 the Lord plainly says, such doubters and unbelievers can have no happiness here or hereafter. The Lord, anticipating our natural and eager query as to how we can get rid of this devil of doubt, answers in verse 42 that the remedy is in our own hands. We have to kill this demon of doubt working in our heart, begotten of ignorance, by the sword of knowledge and take refuge in the practice of Yoga, rise to higher and higher states of knowledge and wisdom. By such a practice of Yoga alone can you get freedom from all bondage or action. Is not this the same as the central teaching, viz. '*Yogi bhava*'?

27. 'HE IS EVER FREE'

Yah sadā mukta éva sah

The implications of 'dexterity in action' are elucidated further in the fifth chapter. It is only a literary device to elucidate and emphasize the Lord's own special point of view. You may remember that Arjuna was not able to see his way clearly before him. Whichever course of action he took, he was faced with consequences disastrous, tragic and unpleasant. Hence he sought his friend's advice and guidance. At one stage he was asked to do

his duty without the least consideration of gain or loss, i.e. the attitude of a Yogi was held up as the most important thing to acquire. It was also declared later that there was nothing equal to *jñāna* (*jñāněna sadṛśam*) as the fire of wisdom can burn away the evil consequences of all *Karmas* (IV—37-39). There has always been a notion prevalent that *jñāna* meant renunciation of all activity. Even today ignorant people think that a *jñāni* ought not to take any part, lot or interest in the common concerns of the world. Hence Arjuna's mild murmur. As there was a confusion in his mind regarding *Sanyāsa* and *Yoga*, Arjuna desires to be told definitely which of these two is the better course of action for him.

The Lord replies that both aim at one and the same goal. The difference is only apparent. Verse 3 sets at rest all possible doubts by declaring that he alone is a true *Sanyāsi* who has attained to a state of mind free from all desires and has transcended all pairs of opposites. Such an outlook frees him from all bondage of Karma. It must be recognized that such a true *Sanyāsa* or renunciation of activity is impossible for most of us ordinary men of the world. But any one who is firmly established in a yogic or equipoised state of mind attains absolute freedom or perfection even though he is engaged in activity.

Verses 4 and 5 deserve some attention. If the Lord's interest or purpose were merely to write a philosophical treatise or to expound some one particular system of thought, he would have been content with stating and elaborating one or other alternative alone. But life does not proceed according to any cut and dry plan or scheme. The same coat cannot fit everybody. Man's tastes and temperaments differ. One and the same individual has varying moods. If full satisfaction is to be attained in

the tortuous and erratic course of human life, the Gita method (which takes account of every possible position) alone would serve the purpose. Don't you see in Sri Ramakrishna the same method? His advice is not the same to everyone, but different according to the nature of the seekers. All his teachings however aim at one and the same goal, viz. supreme happiness and freedom from bondage. The *Sānkhya* and *Yoga*, the Lord tells Arjuna, ultimately lead to one and the same goal. From this stage onwards you will see that Devotion to God is introduced and elaborated as a powerful stabilizing force. Without the strong lever of Devotion which becomes absorbing as it deepens it is not possible to sustain oneself in any one path. It serves the purpose of an anchor to a boat in a wild mid-stream.

Verse 7 reiterates the old teaching and assures Arjuna that 'freedom from all bondage of action is within the reach of the Yogi.'

Verses 8-11 illustrate how the truly wise see inaction in action. This has been elaborated already. For all outward purposes we find the Yogi behaving exactly like the man in the street. In speaking, in walking, talking, sleeping, eating, etc. there is no difference. But the Yogi's mind is firmly fixed and established in God and has therefore not even a trace of attachment, of clinging to the fruits of action. Like the drop of water on the lotus he escapes all sin or bondage. Whenever he does any action, it is only his limbs and senses that play their part, but the mind itself floats aloft untrammelled and free.

Verse 12 reiterates that attachment to fruits inevitably brings on bondages while the Yogi being unattached attains perfect peace.

Verse 13 further clarifies the attitude of a true Yogi. Though he possesses a physical body exactly like others

he remains supremely free. The implication of this verse is very well brought out in the episode of Purandra in the Bhagavatam.

Verses 14-17 recall verses 27, 28 and 29 of the third chapter. Here the implication is this. The idea of doer, duty, etc. springs from the notion of an individual and independent ego in the ordinary sense. If one attains the right vision and right wisdom, he will have no ego. He reaches a stage of perfect freedom and does not return to the world of bondage. You should not run away with the idea that there is no such thing as virtue or vice or duty even. These terms are strictly relative. As long as you retain the idea of the ego with desires, aversion, etc. all relative conceptions such as duty, virtue and others must be accepted and respected in full. What the Lord describes here is the ultimate standpoint of a liberated soul. Ordinarily we speak of the rising and setting of the sun. This is only relative to people on some one position of the globe. But in truth and reality the sun shines always uniformly and remains unaffected.

In verses 18-26 the Lord describes how the perfected and liberated man behaves and acts. You can easily recognize these characteristics as identical with those of a *Sthitaprajña* or a Yogi. You will find more or less similar descriptions in future as well. This only proves, if any proof were needed, the unmistakable central teaching which is adverted to again and again in so many different ways and from so many different approaches. Notice specially verse 18. The wise man sees God in the most learned scholar, in a cow, elephant, dog and a low-born man. This emphasizes only his serene mental outlook and reaction but does not deny the objective qualitative differences in the various percepts. Such an attitude is possible only when the mind is purged of all

desires, clinging and impulsions. When all these turbulent waves are quelled, there is no room for anything except perfect bliss or *ānandam*.

Sri Ramakrishna asks: 'Do you know what I see outside? I see everything as He. I see men and other creatures as so many puppets covered with skin moving their limbs. But the same Lord resides in everything and makes them move about.'

Verses 27-28 describe the *Sādhana* or the technique of Yoga. Verse 29 teaches that the safest or surest way to peace is to regard the Lord as the goal of all the endeavours or *Sādhana* for He is the Friend of all, the Master of all sacrifice and Dispenser of all austerities.

28. THEREFORE SO THOU BECOME A YOGIN, ARJUNA

Tasmād yogī bhavārjuna

The first verse of the sixth chapter sums up the previous discussions. Once more the Lord states in identical terms the special teaching of the Gita. What can be plainer than the following? Know that he is both a *Sanyāsi* and a *Yogi* when he does his action without desire for fruit. But certainly not he who has merely gone through the ceremony of *Sanyāsa* or given up all work, as is popularly supposed. *Sanyāsin* and *Nirāgni* are used synonymously because till the formal vows of the fourth order are taken after due rituals every person is expected to keep alight and worship the sacred fire and perform the daily five-fold sacrifices.

Verse 2 once more identifies *Sanyāsa* with *Yoga* by emphasizing renunciation of *Sankalpa* and expectation of fruits and rewards as the very *sine-qua-non* of true *Yoga*.

Verses 3 and 4 mean that complete detachment or renunciation of fruits or results of action is attained only by stages or through *Sādhana*. The different stages through which one attains to perfection in Yoga are detailed in verses 8-11 of chapter XII. You might have already seen that the outlook of the Gita is to secure freedom from the bondages of action and not from action altogether. Action in itself is not a bondage. On the other hand it is absolutely necessary for social welfare. One need not become bound by an action if it is performed for its own sake as a piece of duty or *dharma*.

Verses 5 and 6 re-emphasize that the evil or source of bondage is not outside but within our own selves. You may recall the famous lines from Milton's 'Paradise Lost'—'The mind is its own place. It can make a Hell of Heaven or Heaven of Hell.'

We must search within and purge ourselves of all lower sensuous impulses that goad us on to run after pleasures and enjoyments. Our own lower self is our worst enemy, always landing us in troubles. An uncontrolled person can never enjoy peace or happiness. *Cf.* Tennyson:

> Self-reverence, self-knowledge and self-control
> These three alone lead life to sovereign power.

Another famous quotation which might occur to your mind is:

> To thine own self be true and it must follow, as the night the day;
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.

A full and complete control over our lower nature is the real conquest of self. Such controlled self, i.e. our true and nobler self is our best friend. This alone elevates and ennobles us. Verses 7-9 repeat some striking characteristics of a true Yogi or one who is guided by

this nobler self. You must pay special attention to such phrases as *Samalôshṭāśmakāncanah* and *Samabuddhi*. 'It is bad economics,' you might say, 'how can gold and clay or stone be treated as equal?' It is not the exchange value that is spoken of here. Why? for a child pieces of gold have not the same value which they have for a grown-up person. You may recollect that in the life of Sri Ramakrishna he actually took pieces of gold and threw them away as useless, being causes of evil. For a long time his body shrank from the contact of any 'precious' metal. You always argue that it is not possible for us ordinary mortals to attain the level of Sri Ramakrishna. There is much force in your argument. Nevertheless the ideal Yogi, as described in the Gita, more or less in the same terms on different occasions, has some such definite qualities. Our insatiable desire for material wealth and possessions is the real poison more deadly than any chemical that causes instantaneous death. You cannot hope for peace and happiness here and hereafter unless you definitely turn away from the mad rush after pleasures and possessions. As Christ would say, 'You cannot serve both God and Mammon at the same time.' Kill all desires and you have already entered the Kingdom of Heaven or reached perfection or Supreme bliss. A calm and self-contained person has immense capacity for doing good. The spirit of this teaching is unmistakable. The clay and gold example should not be taken literally or caricatured.

Verses 11-15 give technical details of a particular *Sādhana*. Most of these details you could become familiar with if you read *Rajayoga* by Swami Vivekananda or any other standard text-book on Yoga.

Control of breath, seat and posture are merely accessories favourable to gain mastery of one's mind or

passions. They are not in themselves of great merit or value. If one fails to appraise their strict limitations, they may lead to dangerous results. Recall Sri Ramakrishna's warning to his disciples against *Haṭha Yoga*.

Now take verses 16 and 17. You may remember that I am fond of urging that you should always adopt the golden mean; that you should avoid all extremes; I stressed that especially when you reduced your food to a ridiculous minimum and converted night into day just before your examinations. Examination or no examination, extremes never do any good and ought to be avoided by all means. Gautama for several years before his final illumination or Buddhahood followed the path of some extremist Yogis, reduced his body to a mere skeleton and fell down unconscious whilst he was walking. He found that all his tortures and penances did not take him to the Supreme goal. Therefore he adopted the golden mean, avoiding both indulgence and starvation and as the saying goes '*men sana in corpore sano*', he attained illumination after he gave up self-mortification. Consequently he was never tired of preaching the golden mean in all spheres of life and activity. Swami Vivekananda, following his Master's noble example, held before the Ramakrishna order and the world at large this very healthy and salutary ideal.

The Lord instructs Arjuna in verses 11-15 regarding physical and external preparatory steps to Yoga. In these verses (18-23) the more subtle, mental impediments and obstacles are pointed out and hints given as to how he can overcome them. Verses 24-32 describe some practical methods of attaining the yogic state of mind, which alone can confer the Supreme bliss and freedom. You often ask how you are to control the mind. It is no doubt a difficult task. Every one realizes it. Some

even go to the length of saying that it is a hopeless and impossible task. Such a despairing attitude is merely negative and does no good to anybody. You must take a sportsman-like attitude.

It is not possible to acquire mastery of any game at the first start. You make many awkward hits or miss many a ball before you attain some decent skill. With the control of the mind it is more difficult being more subtle. The mastery is no doubt difficult but patience, steady practice, genuine faith must be kept up. You will notice Arjuna himself raises these difficulties in the two verses 33 and 34 of this chapter to which the Lord replies sympathetically in the next two verses. He admits that the mind is undoubtedly restless and uncontrollable. The remedy suggested is 'steady and constant practice' (*abhyāsa*), coupled with 'discriminatory renunciation' (*vairāgya*). These two phrases *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* though very common and familiar are full of significance and suggestions. You may recall the 'Yoga Sutra' of Patanjali—*abhyāsa vairāgyābhyām tannirôdah. Abhyāsa* is necessary for the mastery of any art. Man is said to be a bundle of habits. Practice makes one perfect. The trouble is we are all impatient and want immediate or quick results. Another difficulty is that for a beginner spiritual practice is really irksome and unpleasant, dull or mechanical. If we are keen on achieving success even this drudgery must be borne cheerfully. There is no use of mincing matters. Pleasant or otherwise, steady practice is absolutely essential. There is no short cut. The second condition is *vairāgya* which is translated as dispassion, renunciation or turning the mind away from the objects of desire. Very commonly, the more we think of avoiding a thing, the more we seem to get entangled in it. Recall the Tamil proverb 'Do not think of the cost when

you take the medicine.' This advice, a simple one, was not found so easy by the patient. You might impatiently ask 'How then are we to turn our mind away?' There is always a desire for some one thing or another. Sri Ramakrishna's advice is '*Môd Phirādô.*' (Turn the phase or direction of the current of your mind.) For example you have the usual *Kāma, Krôda,* etc. Turn these towards God. Desire or even lust for Him. You may get angry with Him for not revealing Himself and so on. Even this presupposes a living faith in His existence. Realizing Him is the *summum bonum* of life.

In verse 36 the Lord emphasizes the need for control or mastery of one's mind and freedom from all kinds of desires. Otherwise Yoga is impossible.

In the next three verses Arjuna enquires about the fate of these earnest and devout aspirants who slip down or fall in their *Sādhanas.* The reply is given in verse 40 which is verily a gospel of hope, encouragement and inspiration for all who work for good of any kind. The Lord states categorically and emphatically, 'neither in this nor in the next world can any evil ultimately happen to those who do good.' Recall verse 40 in chapter II. This verse is a sort of insurance against any possibility of failure. No honest effort is lost. The Lord anticipates all possible doubts and gives a most satisfactory answer in the following five verses (41-45). We often come across in the world instances of very pious and devoted *Sādhakas* (aspirants) meeting with a crash, ending miserably or completely falling away from their chosen path or ideal. They become targets of the ridicule and scorn of all the world. In the face of such glaring examples how are we to take at its face value the Lord's declaration: 'No evil has ever befallen the doer of good'? The explanation is this. Our present life which is but a brief

span is not the be-all and end-all of the soul. We have had many lives before. We must continue to pass through many more until we reach perfection. In verses 41-43 the Lord says that such failures are really the foundation for our further struggle and upward march. Birth in a pure and rich family or of very pious, perfect, yogic parents is a rare privilege indeed. It falls to the lot of the few most fortunate as if in reward for the earnest struggles in their former lives. This raises the question of transmigration of souls or *punarjanma*; of re-birth and its twin or collateral issue, the doctrine of *Karma*. These two form the very bed-rock upon which the entire Hindu spiritual culture and outlook is based. These doctrines are common to all sects of thought and philosophy including even the unorthodox Buddhism and Jainism. You have often questioned this doctrine of *Karma* in your letters. As usual my reply is this. You cannot expect a laboratory or test tube proof or demonstration. It is a matter concerning supersensuous realms. How can we prove in the usually accepted scientific sense of the term problems of Death and afterwards? Take this as a theory framed or concerned to explain some riddle of life. If it gives even some amount of satisfaction, it must be accepted as true and valid so far as it goes. In the absence of a better and more satisfactory theory or explanation, there is no point in picking holes in this.

Verse 46 eulogizes the supremacy of Yoga and 47 states the superiority of devotion to the Lord.

Mark also the term '*Yogi bhava*' which is the quintessence of the central teaching of the Gita. If you take count actually, you will find that the words 'Yoga' and 'Yogi' occur as many as thirty-five times in this single chapter.

29. LIKE PEARLS STRUNG ON A THREAD

Sūtré maṇigaṇā iva

You may recollect Sri Ramakrishna's advice, 'turn the direction of the mind'. What is the natural bent or direction of the mind? To what is it attached and on what is it sustained? Pleasures, personal comforts, friends and possessions? In the first verse of chapter seven, the Lord points out how the best of Yogis have attachment only to God and depend wholly upon Him. Note the terms '*Āsakti*' (attachment), '*Āśraya*' (dependence). Such an attachment and dependence could come only when we know the Lord truly in the fulness of his glory. In the second verse, the Lord says he will describe that knowing which everything else is known.

Verse 3 need not discourage us. To be a perfect Yogi, to know God or the highest truth in its entirety is not so simple as passing an examination and getting degrees. It requires wholehearted devotion and tireless and patient application. No price can be considered too high for this glorious knowledge.

Verses 4-7 describe the relation of God to the universe and conclude in a most poetic way, 'everything is threaded upon me as pearls on a string.'

Verses 8-12 give examples of how the Lord is the string holding all things or the inner core running through everything.

Verse 13 states why people are unable to recognize the patent fact that the Lord is the essence and sustainer of everything.

Verses 14-15 amplify the overpowering nature of *Māya* and show how to escape it. Only those who take shelter under the Lotus feet of the Lord and surrender their will unconditionally to Him can escape. All others

ensnared by egoism are misled. These are verily the worst among men (*Narādhamah*).

Even among the devotees there are several grades according to their motives. Four such are specifically mentioned in verse 16.

Verses 17-19 eulogize realization through complete self-surrender which is *Bhakti* of the true type, the highest form of devotion. Naturally it is very rare to find one such and it is the fruit and fulfilment of the struggles undertaken and devotion exercised in many previous births.

The rest of the chapter may be taken together. The Lord's true nature as the ultimate cause, creator, sustainer and the basic principles or substratum of everything in the universe on the one hand and the three-fold aspects of *Prakṛti* and their delusive character on the other are introduced, and they will recur often in the Gita as we proceed. This point will become more clear as you will notice it elaborately illustrated in the *Vibhūti yoga* and *Viśvarūpa darśanam* in chapters X and XI.

Verse 20 states that as men's tastes differ in food, dress and all other matters, their methods of and motives for worship also take different forms arising out of their own particular nature. Our puranas cater to all possible categories of outlook and temperament. You will be astonished at the variety of rites, ceremonies, rituals of worship for gaining success in almost every conceivable department of life and activity. The obvious reason is that unless some gain or reward is assured no one is ordinarily prepared to undertake any task. As the Sanskrit popular saying goes, *prayōjanam anuddiśya na mando api pravartaté*. (Without considering the gain, even the dullest does not exert.) The motive behind the puranas painting in glowing colours the pleasures of heaven and

earth is to induce men at very low levels of development to perform rites, ceremonies and rituals. These ultimately help to tame and control the wild beast in man and finally bring out the divinity in him. But this has been carried to absurd extremes. All Mahatmyas and Palasrutis are vitiated by this tendency. Even the Gita has not been spared this commercialization or marketing and advertising. In the Varahapurana there is a chapter called Gita Mahatmyam which you will find appended to almost every edition of the Gita. Perhaps to the modern rationalistic mind this Mahatmyam might appear in a more vulgar and secular light than what has been described above. The Padmapurana has got some 18 fantastic stories one for each chapter to prove (as if proof were needed) the importance and merit of reciting the Gita. It has always occurred to me that these attempts at glorification are all instances of misplaced enthusiasm. It is an appeal to the mass psychology or a case of exploitation of the credulous and the gullible. Such attempts whatever merits they might have possessed in ancient days serve only to rouse ridicule and bring obloquy on religion in general. Do you believe that we are all changed very materially from our forefathers of the Puranic age? I do not feel so. We too have shibboleths, idols in the shape of talkies, ballot boxes, political catch phrases and slogans. What can you say regarding the big *yajñas* that are being performed for world peace and what not? Forms and labels only have changed. But the Gita stands as a grand edifice providing hope, inspiration and strength for all the sane minds in all climes and times.

Look at the next two verses (21-22). Don't you feel that it is as if Sri Ramakrishna echoes this very ideal? The Lord declares *Yo yo yām.* In whatever form and

shape there is true devotion directed to God, that the Lord confirms, accepts and rewards accordingly. He alone is the ultimate and fundamental essence though manifesting to men in different shapes, forms and names.

The Lord Himself explains why and how the various devotees practising different forms of worship fail to recognize Him as the master and goal of all sacrifices. The reason is they hanker after immediate satisfaction of temporary and trifling desires. Our egoism is the cause of endless waves of desires of all sorts.

We fail to realize that if we devote our minds to the Supreme Lord there could remain no unfulfilled desire or no other object to be gained.

We are unable to see that the Lord is the fulfilment or the *summum bonum* of human adventure. This inability inherent as it were in all human beings is described as *yoga māyā, devi māyā* or *Prakṛti*. These terms will come again and again. As Swami Vivekananda puts it, it is not a theory or explanation but simply a mere statement of fact. We have only to take account of it and seek ways and means of escape. The Lord in His infinite mercy teaches in the Gita, again and again, 'to abandon desires of every kind and to seek His shelter and love Him alone.' Even the least trace of desire is fatal to this simple and sure remedy. You may recall the famous saying *Jaham Kam hai tahan Ram nahi*, etc. Notice that in verse 28 the Lord describes clearly the conditions under which alone the devotion of the right type is possible. The last two verses form the connecting link and introduction to the next chapter. Notice the statement that a true Yogi even at the point of death is conscious of the Lord's glory and remembers Him.

30. REMEMBER ME ALONE ALWAYS

Sarvéshu kāléshu māmanusmara

What happens when a Yogi throws away his mortal coil? Whither and how goes he? What is the difference between him and ordinary people and other similar questions will occur to everybody's mind. These are answered in this chapter (VIII). I may tell you at the outset that I have no very definite opinions and conclusion regarding these topics. The eighth chapter contains many topics which are mythological and mystical. These being not wholly relevant to or vitally affecting the central teaching and the main purpose of the Gita may be passed over from our special point of view.

You will naturally have before you a good translation of the Gita when reading these letters. Hence I supply you merely with what may be called footnotes. Of the various questions raised by Arjuna in the first two verses, we shall consider only the last one, viz. 'how are You to be realized at the time of death by those of steadfast mind?' Verses 5-15 refer to the special manner of the Yogi's passing away and the principles governing this aspect of the *Yoga*. The general principle is stated in verse 6 and verse 5 says that because the Yogi's thoughts are concentrated on the Lord at the last moment they attain to Him. What determines the nature of our next birth is a very important question, especially as we all believe in transmigration and its collateral doctrine of *Karma*. There are various theories bearing on this point. Some allow for an interval in which the soul either enjoys heaven or hell according as it had led a good or bad life or both alternatively in the case of a life of mixed nature and then the soul returns to the earth. (Vide ch. IX, 20-21.) Some others seem to hold that

this life is given up only after the next one is already seized.

All these seem to amount to something like this. When we ascend a ladder or some flight of steps we do not take our feet off the lower one till the foot is firm on the upper. The classical example is that of a grasshopper. It catches hold of the next leaf or blade of grass before it leaves the hold on the former. It is believed that at the last moment the soul gets a picture of the nature of its next birth and life. The modifications which the face undergoes are probably an indication of this glimpse. The contortions and other ugly symptoms of the face or the serene smile that rests need not be attributed to this unprovable reason. Possibly there may be other causes. The doctrine that our last thoughts of the last moments determine the nature of our next birth deserves to be examined further. In normal moments we are able to suppress unpleasant or bad thoughts by a force of our will even though they may be strong and working vigorously below the surface. At our last breath the vitality being low, the will to suppress undesirable thoughts may be altogether absent. What is within alone will come to the surface. So if we are to ensure that good thoughts of the Lord alone should predominate our last moments we must take care to fill our mind with thoughts of the Lord in all normal moments so that they become part of our very nature and by their very constancy and force drive all other thoughts away. As the proverb says, 'If we take care of the pence, the pounds will take care of themselves.' If we are careful about our thoughts at ordinary moments, we need not worry about the last thoughts and hence it is the Lord says in verse:

'Sarvéshu kāléshu māmanusmara'

The supremacy and all-determining nature of the last moments have given rise to the doctrine of *caraṇā-smṛti*. Whatever may be the nature of one's life and conduct if, by hook or crook, he can think of the Lord or barely utter his name at the last moment, one's salvation is ensured. The extreme position of this doctrine is illustrated in the story of Ajamila. He was breaking all the commandments of God throughout his career and at the last moment of death called his pet son, 'Narayana' by name. The story says that because he uttered the Lord's name though with different import, he was freed from all sins and a celestial chariot came and carried him to the Heavens!

I might refer to the custom of the Hindus chanting sacred scriptures at a death-bed or doing bhajan or chanting God's names and even muttering the sacred names in the right ear of the dying person. Each sect has an elaborate ritual and peculiar philosophy bearing on this observance.

Gita chapter XVIII verse 66 forms one of the three verses of the charna sloka of the Vaishnavas.

Verse 8 describes how to attain this concentration and the others up to 13 explain the technical yogic process of meditation and giving up one's *prāṇa*.

Verses 14 and 15 eulogize the state of a person whose mind constantly dwells on the Lord and describes how he is free from all bondages and misery and rebirth.

Verse 16 states the general rule that all beings including Brahma are subject to rebirth but those that attain to the Lord have no need to come to earth again.

The rest of the chapter refers to two different paths. One leading to eternal freedom and the other to rebirth. It is not quite clear what these two exactly mean. It is not certainly six months of the calendar year but somehow

mythologically popular belief has taken these to mean the periods January 15th to July 15th and July 15th to January 15th. These are believed to be the day and night respectively for the gods. Mystery mongering weaves all sorts of fantastic theories round these ideas. You may recall in the Mahabharata that Bhishma was waiting for the Uttarayana or the bright half of the year to set in to give up his body. Some Yogis say that it is something internal concerned with *Ida* and *Pingala nāḍis*. Let scholars fight and come to any agreement if they ever could do so. We shall be quite safe if we concentrate our attention upon the substantial categorical teaching of the Lord in the last two verses, viz. 'become a *yogayukta*.'

The last verse contains important clues full of deep significance. For one thing it hints broadly that all meritorious deeds and penances (quite good in themselves) have no supreme value judged by the ultimate consequences. They do not lead to release from the bondage of birth and death. The Commandment 'Remember me always' is the germ of the doctrine of *Ananya bhakti* which comes into more and more prominence in the future chapters. The supreme goal of life or the '*parama purushārtha*' is to attain to a state of emancipation or *moksha*. This must be sought through '*Ananya bhakti*' or the constant remembrance of God on all occasions in all situations.

31. DO EVERYTHING AS AN OFFERING UNTO ME

Tat kurusva madarpaṇam

The need for the constant remembrance of God is obvious. The direction is also very simple. But all the difficulty comes in the actual practice. This the Lord elucidates and impresses upon Arjuna's mind by further arguments.

The opening verses 1-3 of the ninth chapter declare that that chapter reveals supreme knowledge and the secret described as *Rājavidyā*. This declaration is followed by a warning or a caution (verse 39) that those who have no faith in this teaching do not attain to the Lord nor escape the round of births and deaths being caught in the meshes of *Samsāra*.

In verses 4-10 the Lord describes how He is the origin, sustenance and the last resort of the entire creation, how He, making use of the *Prakṛti*, brings about this grand display—the universe, cycles of creation and dissolution. He Himself is never bound or affected by these changes. You might notice that this idea is a further elucidation of the one already hinted in chapters IV and VII.

The next two verses 11 and 12 point to the fact that it is very difficult to recognize the Supreme Lord in the human form or the secret of Avatarhood. What obstructs the true vision is, as always, clinging and running after the ordinary pleasures of the world impelled by the violent and stormy nature of the unruly passions which are described as *Rākshasic* and *Asuric* (*Rajas* and *Tamas*). But those who are self-controlled and pure minded (i.e. of *Sātwic* nature) understand the Lord in His true form. They worship Him in many ways, with single-minded

devotion. They realize Him as the core of everything, for, as the verse 16 describes, 'Every item in all sacrifices is the Lord Himself' (*Cf.* IV, 24).

The following verses amplify the Lord's immanence in everything. This idea will be repeated, illustrated, elaborated and clarified in the next few chapters. This is not an easy matter to realize in all its implications, unless one gets *Divya cakshus* or divine vision, through the grace of the Lord. A full and complete understanding is impossible as it is beyond human mind and reason. Such a vision and grace of the Lord is attainable only through wholehearted and right-minded devotion, *ananya bhakti*, (ch. XI, 53, 54).

All other religious and meritorious acts performed with some ends in view such as the vedic sacrifices, etc. can only lead to enjoyments in heaven. These are, however, impermanent and lead ultimately to rebirth in the world (verses 20 and 21).

Verse 22 is a very oft quoted and familiar one. It declares that those who depend solely upon God are never forsaken. Even the minutest detail of their welfare is provided for by the Lord. You have heard the story that the Divine Mother Parvati wanted to test if the Lord actually looks after even the minutest requirements of His devotees. As She was retiring to bed, She took a tiny ant, put it in a small case, sealed it and concealed it below Her pillow. She was absolutely certain that this single instance of the little ant could prove an exception to the Lord's solicitude for His creatures. Early morning She questioned the Lord whether He provided for the food of every creature the previous night. The Lord smiled and replied, 'My scheme is fool-proof. Every creature gets the allotted share. There is no need for me to verify or ascertain.' The Devi challenged the Lord's

statement and triumphantly produced the small case as a proof of His failure and an exception to His assurance. The Lord pretended ignorance and wanted more tangible proof. Lo! Parvati opened the case and the little ant had a small particle of food put in its mouth. The entire voluminous literature of the saints of the world throughout the ages afford ample and conclusive evidence of the truth of this verse.

The next three verses (23-25) point out that the Lord is the ultimate goal of all sacrifices performed in whatever name and form with different motives. Hence the Lord considers that they are all '*Avidhi pūrvakam*' (not in accordance with the rules of highest conduct), viz. *nishkāma karma*. Therefore to attain the *summum bonum* of life, freedom from *Samsāra* and final release from the never ending cycle of birth and death, offer worship to the Lord with true devotion.

The Lord teaches in verses 26-27, 'whatever acts you perform and whatever offering you give, do everything for His sake only.' This is true *Sanyāsa*, true *Karma yoga*, the only way to be free from all bondages of the world. This is repeated and emphasized in the next verse (28).

29-33. As Sri Ramakrishna would say, the Lord is the common uncle moon to everyone. Whoever cares to approach Him, He is always ready and accessible. Nay, He is even anxious for devotees to approach Him. When they do, He becomes one with them. There is no condition for such grace and blessing of the Lord except the simple one, i.e. single-minded, wholehearted devotion (*ananya bhakti*). All castes high and low, all persons good and bad, are purified, become supremely blessed and are never forsaken by the Lord nor would any harm or evil approach them. Why we should do this is put so

briefly and neatly in '*anityam asukham lokam.*' (This world is fleeting and contains no real joy but only misery and suffering.) Everything depends upon our view of the world. Do we accept what the Lord says about the world as *anityam* and *asukham*? All founders of religion, all saints of all times and climes have proclaimed this truth with a trumpet voice from the house-tops. Recall especially that the Buddha's starting point in his teaching is that the world is *anitya*, and *duhkha*.

The Buddha's philosophy is often criticized as pessimism. Why? When I talk to you and your friends about the futility and vanity of your most glorious achievements you all smile and say 'Let us become old and then we will become very good and perfect.' A friend of yours once quoted by way of reply to me the familiar English verse,

Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an empty dream . . . .
. . . . slumbers
Things are not what they seem.

Every successful candidate at the elections and politicians puffed up with power, prestige and patronage, rich men endowed with heavy stomachs all through the day, rolling in luxuries and roaming about in a Rolls Royce will not even listen to this teaching. They will call me all sorts of names and give such teaching very obnoxious labels. The truth is, for all a time must and will come when, as to Arjuna, the situation as they find themselves in will become intolerable. They will feel in doubt and darkness as to what to do (*dharma sammūḍa cétah*) and will be anxious for a wise teacher to show them the way. Then the real nature of this world as '*anityam*' and '*asukham*' will be felt as not mere poetry or philosophy but as a grim reality to be faced at all costs.

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The last verse is a final exhortation. It sums up everything is a grand harmony or symphony. Psychologists recognize three aspects of the mind. Cognition; emotion and conation. In whatever form the mind functions thinking, feeling and acting, the Lord must be the one goal. In philosophical terms it means that one is at liberty to choose, *Jñāna, Bhakti* or *Karma mārga*. But remember each must be a *Yoga* or union with the Lord. Perhaps the fourth direction, *mām namaskuru* (Do homage unto Me) might be taken to mean, surrender unto Him or seek His Lotus feet as the never-failing refuge. Rather, at the end of all the three paths, you will find that the Lord Himself is both the means and the end and so you lose yourself in Him, i.e. your ego vanishes when you surrender completely. (Compare chapter XVIII, 66.)

32. THOU ART THE SUPREME

Paramam bhavān

You might recall that even from the fourth chapter the Lord has been throwing hints now and then to Arjuna about His own Supreme Nature, as the ultimate reality or the thread running through everything in the universe. Yet He is beyond all these as well. He has two aspects, (1) as the life and sustainer of everything, (2) as the supreme and beyond of everything, remaining unaffected by the cosmic process of evolution or involution. To impress upon Arjuna the Lord recapitulates and details in chapter X every aspect of His glory as far as possible through enumeration or description by words.

In verses 1-11, the Lord gives a summary of how the universe has emanated from Him, how one who knows

this truth is freed from all sins and bondages. It is interesting to note how the Lord helps His devotees to attain such a release. True devotees always delight only in God, in talking about Him, singing His glory and describing His wonderful deeds. As Sri Ramakrishna says, 'The heart of such a true devotee is the favourite resort of God, his durbar hall.' This means as the Lord puts it expressly in verse 11 that He resides and shines with all His glory in the heart of the devotees. Consequently all darkness of doubt and evil automatically vanish before the effulgent Sun of Wisdom. This naturally rouses Arjuna's interest to know in more detail the glory of the Lord.

In verses 12-18 Arjuna's question is followed by the Lord's answer. The Lord prefaces His detailed exposition with the remark that it is not possible to exhaust his *vibhūti* or glory and what follows must therefore be taken and understood as only illustrative and not exhaustive.

In the last two verses the Lord indicates that every form of greatness, splendour or merit worthy of respect or admiration is only a manifestation of a part of His glory and all that have been detailed in verses 21-40 are but illustrations of this general principle.

The Lord concludes by saying that the details would only lead to confusion, and it is enough if we understand that the entire universe is but a spark (*Ekāmśa*) of His splendour and glory.

Sri Ramakrishna used to pay due respect to all scholars or anyone endowed with any special merit or gift. He recognized in every such instance a manifestation of the glory of God (*vibhūti*). His attitude and behaviour in this respect is a living example of the essence of the teaching of the Lord in this chapter.

33. BE THOU MERELY AN INSTRUMENT

Nimitta mātram bhava

We are hardly satisfied with the mere description of a thing but wish to experience it in the proper manner, i.e. taste what is to be tasted, see what is to be seen. Hence Arjuna's request for a direct vision of the Lord in everything and as everything or *Viśvarūpa darśanam*. But we see and can see only definite and finite objects of perception. A cosmic vision or *Viśvarūpa darśanam* is a contradiction in terms. At least it cannot be any species of ordinary vision or perception.

The first 4 verses of chapter XI describe Arjuna's bare intellectual understanding (exactly just as we understand a thing when described) but nothing more definite. He says that in so many words in verse 2. It is natural therefore that he should ask his friend and Lord to show him His true form even exactly as He described it Himself. The Lord graciously accedes and directs Arjuna to see in his own person and body what he desires to see (verse 7). But the Lord immediately adds that he will not be able to see His true and glorious form with his ordinary physical eyes and grants him therefore yogic or supernatural vision. Note that verse 9 states that the Lord is Master of Yoga.

Yogis (adepts of a high order) have access to and control over the powers of the mind to an unlimited and remarkable extent. People marvel and call such a display of supernatural powers a miracle. It, no doubt, is extraordinary but it is not a case of transgressing or annulling the laws of nature or of the mind. By practice one can extend the limits of the ordinary capacity of the mind. The entire science of Yoga deals with such problems and even today we come across cases of

clairvoyance, clairaudience and other supernormal phenomena.

You have studied the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Such extension of normal powers was a daily occurrence in his life. By mere touch he has more than once conferred on Swami Vivekananda (then Narendranath) a yogic or supernatural consciousness. Many such instances in the case of others also are on record thoroughly authenticated and beyond doubt. We all regard Sri Krishna as Iswara, Lord of Yoga, Master and Ruler of Maya. It is not a matter of surprise or wonder that He should have enabled Arjuna to have a vision of the Lord in His supreme and glorious form. Verses 11-14, 15-25 and 26-31 are all concerned with the vision granted to Arjuna. The first part (11-15) is described by Sanjaya to Dhritarashtra purporting to be what Arjuna saw. Verses 15-25 and 26-31 are put in the mouth of Arjuna himself and describe what he saw with his own newly acquired supernatural or yogic eyes.

Verses 11-25 refer to the Lord's own glorious nature and 26-27 describe the familiar warriors and things falling into the wide jaws of the Lord's fearful mouth and being destroyed in various horrible ways.

Verses 28-29 describe in superb poesy with apt and beautiful similes, how their doom is both natural and inevitable. Just a minute ago Arjuna has seen all the warriors on both sides ready to fight in full vigour and health. But the fight has not yet begun. Not even a single shot has been fired on either side. Yet Arjuna sees in his vision all this brave array already finished and destroyed. Hence he is puzzled. The terrible vision of the Lord has made his head reel so much that he cannot distinguish east from west or north from south. In utter fear and awe he begs for mercy. Evidently he felt

he himself was about to die. He wishes to know what the Lord is about and what His true nature is.

Recall the first touch of Sri Ramakrishna and the effect on Swamiji. The latter felt that he was about to die and cried out, 'What are you doing to me? I have my parents at home.' Sudden exaltation or supernatural visions upset and unbalance the even tenor of life. The reply is very important and significant, well worth careful study and attention. The Lord is 'all devouring Time which spares nobody.' (*Kālô asmi*). Further, whether Arjuna fights or not all the warriors are already doomed and would inevitably be swallowed up in the wide jaws of Time. Therefore Arjuna is called upon to gird up his loins and gain glory and name as conqueror and enjoy the kingdom, for he is but a mere tool or instrument in the hands of the Lord.

Verse 34 asks Arjuna to vanquish Bhishma, Drona and others in the physical plane since they are already marked out for destruction by the Lord according to His cosmic plan.

Verses 36-46 contain Arjuna's prayer and praise of the Lord. He begs for mercy and pardon for all the acts of omission and commission done to the Lord in ignorance of His true nature. For is not the Lord our father, brother and the most beloved? Verse 44 puts this prayer in a sweet and human way.

Verses 47-49 contain the Lord's answer to Arjuna, that it is a rare and great privilege that he was enabled to have the vision of the Lord in this manner and that he need not be disturbed or worried. He then shows Himself in His sweet, normal and familiar form.

The rest of the chapter is only a pacification of Arjuna's distracted mind. Except through the grace of

the Supreme Lord, it is impossible to see His real nature by any human endeavour.

Therefore the Lord exhorts Arjuna in verse 55 once again to 'be a Yogi' which He explains as 'Doing work for Him, to be with Him, to be devoted to Him, to be free from all attachments and to be in love with all creatures.'

34. 'EXCEEDINGLY DEAR TO ME ARE THE TRUE DEVOTEES'

Bhaktāstē atīva mē priyāh

The supreme qualification for attaining the Lord's grace was mentioned by Him as 'single-minded devotion' (*Ananya bhakti*). The first verse of chapter twelve may be taken as a literary device to reinforce the superiority of single-minded devotion to the Lord over every other form of Yoga. The other path, viz. meditation on the Lord in His *Nirguṇa* aspect no doubt ultimately leads to Him. But, as the Lord explains, it is more difficult.

You may recollect Sri Ramakrishna saying that in this age (*Kaliyuga*) all men are severely handicapped by the limitations of the body (*annagata prāṇa*) and therefore *Bhakti Yoga* is the more suitable *sādhana*. This is but the most recent echo of the Lord's teaching in the Gita. In verses 5 and 7 the same familiar central teaching '*Yogi bhava*' is once more repeated and explained. We have to perform all actions, but offer all the fruits to Him and seek Him as the only end and aim of our life.

Verse 8 puts this matter very clearly and categorically. All the aspects of the mind—feeling, reasoning and will must be directed to the Lord.

The next 4 verses assess three methods of liberation from *Samsāra* in the order of ease and superiority. How

one method is easier than the other and yet is superior is a subject matter of controversy. The simple explanation is this. In the direction contained in verse 8 we are asked to dissolve our whole mind including the ego consciousness in God. This is not easy as the Lord has already explained in verse 5. Therefore the Lord teaches the next still easier alternative. The last, viz. abandonment of the fruits of all actions is considered the easiest, the most superior and the best because this is the path which the Lord wants all to follow as illustrated by His own life as well as by those of Janaka and other Rishis who perform actions merely for the welfare of the world. This is most superior because it gives no room or shelter for pseudo or false renunciation resulting from cowardice or laziness. We have come round once again to the perfect or ideal man. For you will see that in all the remaining verses of the chapter, the Lord describes who of all men are dear and most dear to Him. You will notice that all the characteristics are exactly the same as those of the *Sthitaprajña* and *Yogi* of the earlier chapters. They also answer to those of *Guṇātīta*. *Daivīsampat*, and *Sātwika-buddhi*, etc. coming up later. The meaning of all the verses is very simple and no special comment is needed.

Note the phrases '*Śraddhādhānā*' and '*mat parah*' in verse 20. The most crucial test is *Śraddhā* or unwavering and unshakable faith or conviction in the teaching and '*mat parah*' (wholly devoted to the Lord). Possessing these two qualities, the devotee becomes most dear to the Lord.

35. HE IS THE TRUE SEER WHO SEES THE SUPREME LORD IN EVERYTHING

Yah paśyati sah paśyati

A true devotee is fully satisfied and completely happy with his devotion to the Lord. The question of why, wherefore and other innumerable subtleties which philosophers delight in have no meaning for him. But the Gita does not ignore reason. The thirteenth chapter introduces (what you always wish to avoid) some purely philosophical problems. There is no end to the nature and number of questions which the human intellect always delights in raising. In all our scriptures any new subject will somehow be brought in by the interested party by way of reply to a question raised by the listener or some one in the audience. The first verse is just an example of this very common device. We have been following the Lord's teaching even as Arjuna did only as a live issue from a purely practical point of view. I am sure this question would never have suggested itself to you. Nor do we feel, even after it is raised, that it has any very vital or close connexion with the previous teaching. Whether we like it or not, there it is. Let us try to understand this as best as we can. I might as well warn you from the very beginning that subtle controversies rage round the topics raised in this chapter. But without our taking sides we shall try to extract the essence and follow the simple and straightforward meaning.

Verses 1-6 constitute Arjuna's question or raising the topic and the definition of the terms. It is a brief statement of the main issue, viz. what constitutes the body and what the Self or Knower.

Verses 7-11 describe what is termed right knowledge regarding *kshétra* and *kshétrajña*. I am sure you

will immediately recognize this description as quite familiar and almost identical with the perfect man, *Yogi*, *Bhakta*, etc.

Verses 12-18 describe what it is to be known. This is the Lord Himself in His Supreme and Impersonal Form. If you had followed closely Arjuna's vision of the Lord in his cosmic form described in detail in the eleventh chapter as well as the hints dropped here and there in previous chapters such as '*Sūtre maṇigaṇā iva*,' etc. you have no difficulty in following this description.

You have been reading *Tevāram Tiruvāsakam* and *Divya Prabandham*. Stanza after stanza occur wherein you find the Lord described as 'being in everything and not being in any of these'. He is also in and out of all these and yet beyond the reach of all these things also. I shall not therefore linger and say anything more on these verses.

The second half of verse 18 is significant and it says, 'My devotee who knows this truth becomes one with Me.'

In Bhagavatam (IV, 9) Dhruva's episode is described. When he identified himself with Vasudeva by intense meditation and controlled all his breath, the entire universe including the denizens of heaven felt oppressed with a choking sensation and ran to the Lord for help. He assured them safety and went to Dhruva and pacified him. A *bhakta* by his supreme devotion actually becomes one with the Lord who is the support and sustainer of the universe. His act, because of this identification, affects the entire universe.

Verse 19 introduces an entirely new topic, viz. *Prakṛti* and *Purusha*. There is a system of philosophy which specially deals with these two in all details. This is called *Sānkhya Darśana*, perhaps the earliest school of

thought to be systematized by human genius. You will notice that the terminology of this school is borrowed by all other systems of thought, used however in their own way with different connotations. The Gita also uses these terms but not in the same sense and meaning as the orthodox *Sānkhya* school. The nearest or closest version is to be found in the Kapila Devahuti conversation described in Srimad Bhagavatam. A study of the famous *samvāda* or conversation throws light on the teachings of the Lord in the Bhagavad Gita.

Verses 20 and 21 deserve special notice. I have been emphasizing the practical note of the Gita. Arjuna also is only interested to find a way of escaping the bondages of action. We are taught in these two verses how we get bound. It is true the *Purusha*, and the soul (*Jīva*) enjoy good and evil, the play of *Prakṛti* through contact with it. Attachment or clinging to the dualities is the root cause of his being caught in the cycle of *samsāra* or birth and death. Note the definite emphasis on *guṇa sangah* or the attachment to the qualities or expectations of the fruits of our action. That is why the Lord teaches Arjuna to go beyond the Gunas: *nistraiguṇyo bhava* in ch. II, 45. Is not this the same thing as the advice to become a Yogi which is illustrated in the several descriptions of the perfect man?

The drift of the rest of the verses as well as the entire chapter is to provide a philosophical background or explanation as to how a typical Yogi can rise above the dualities of Nature and remain perfectly serene and absolutely unaffected or untainted even while he goes through the whole round of his duties just like ordinary men of the world.

So far as Arjuna is concerned, by granting the cosmic vision, personal teaching and by his own example,

the Lord has done everything possible to dispel all doubts from his mind. We are not in such a happy position. We approach everything through the intellect which can raise problems and doubts in never ending chain. To leave no possible loophole to the tricks of the intellect the Lord has introduced this double philosophical explanation, viz. the method of pure Vedanta and Sankhya darsanas. These schools, I need hardly tell you, came to be regarded as water-tight compartments at a much later date than the Gita or the Bhagavatam.

Verse 24 states in effect that whatever path you choose the goal remains the same. There is nothing new mentioned in this chapter beyond what was already taught in the second and other chapters.

36. TRANSCENDING THE GUNAS HE ENJOYS IMMORTALITY

Guṇānatītya amṛtamaśnuté

The first cause of bondage, *guṇasangah*, is adverted to again. The first 4 verses of the fourteenth chapter are in eulogy of the *Jñāna* about the three gunas. Those who understand this knowledge aright attain oneness with the Lord and are freed from all bondages. Incidentally the Lord reiterates that the entire universe is born of Him. He is the source, inspiration and origin of all things. Then the play of the three gunas of *Prakṛti* comes in, and so deeply are all beings caught in the meshes of Maya that they lose all consciousness of their Divine origin; but the Lord is above and beyond this play and is never affected by their grand evolution.

Verses 5-19 of this chapter contain a beautiful and thorough analysis, descriptive and illustrative, of

the play of the three gunas in every department of thought. Every imaginable question about these gunas is anticipated and answered satisfactorily. Whence, whither, wherefore of the three gunas is all found in these. Would to God that modern books were written in this simple, straight and lucid manner. I challenge you to produce any possible question or doubt about the nature of the gunas that is not answered in these verses. It is interesting to note that the application of the three gunas in the most vital concerns or interests of life is exhaustively dealt with in the earlier part of the eighteenth chapter. These two discussions constitute a thorough and complete ethology of gunas.

I am sure you notice that even *Sātwa*, the purest possible earthly condition, is a source of bondage. Recall Sri Ramakrishna's story of the three thieves.

Take verse 20. As by one thorn you take away another which has stuck in and finally throw both away even so from *tāmasa* to *rājasa*, and from *rājasa* to *sātwa* you rise using one energy to conquer the other or get purified gradually and ultimately you go beyond all these three. Then and then alone birth, death and all kinds of suffering vanish. You become established in the permanent abode of bliss or attain to immortality. Just as a child eagerly asks for detailed descriptions and enquires when it will be distributed if any mention of *prasādam* is made, Arjuna who was always obsessed by the bondage of *Karma*, eagerly asks in verse 21: 'By what sign can a *guṇātīta* be recognized?' The same question, you may remember, was asked about the *Sthitaprajña* also. What follows, viz. verses 22-27 is an exact paraphrase of so many previous descriptions of the *Sthitaprajña*, *Yogi*, *Bhakta*, *Jñāni*, etc., the ideal and perfect man. We see from all these that transcending the gunas is the ultimate

goal that we have to strive for. The Lord teaches that unwavering and one pointed devotion to Him alone is the easiest means because the Lord is the abode of supreme bliss, virtue and immortality. This is the implication of the well known formula '*Akhanḍa Sat Cit Ānandam.*'

37. 'ALL VEDAS INDICATE ME ALONE'

Vedaiśca sarvairahameva vedyah

The human heart craves for a personality on whom it can pour out its love and devotion. Hence the Lord as *Purushottama* is introduced in the fifteenth chapter which is very famous and invested with special sanctity. It is repeated on all occasions when any offering is made to God and devotees partake of the *prasād.* The feeding of His devotees is also a form of worship of the Lord residing in the human heart. The Saiva tradition says 'there will be *Maheśwara Pujā*'. The Vaishnavaites, '*Tadiyārādhanā*', while the modern fashionables call it 'Poor feeding.' You know that we consider this as '*Nārāyaṇasevā*'. Verse 17 has given rise to a special school of thought, culture and tradition round the ideal of the Lord as the *Purushottama.* You will find this point of view very elaborately explained in the most learned essays on the Gita by Sri Aurobindo Ghosh.

Verse 1 speaks of a tree with its roots above and branches below. This will no doubt suggest to you that it is no botanical tree but a philosophical or figurative description. It is a metaphorical representation of the evolution of this world with its various parts and correlates. This huge tree of *samsāra,* beginningless and endless can yet be destroyed easily by '*Asanga*' (non-

attachment or dispassion). It is but a negative aspect. Positively we must seek that state or condition from which there is no return or rebirth. This is accomplished by taking shelter under the Lotus feet of the Lord from whom this never ending creation emanates.

Verse 5 describes all the qualities or signs of this state of surrender or *prapatti*. These you will easily recognize as the characteristics of the Ideal Man, as also the conditions of *Śaraṇāgata* to be inculcated as the final teaching of the Lord in verses 65 and 66 of chapter eighteen.

It is a mixture of both allegorical and scientific concepts. I say a mixture advisedly. The introduction of scientific concepts are meant as hints and clues to the right understanding of the entire picture. Nothing special need be said about the first 11 verses beyond pointing out the truth *Mayi sarvamidam protam sūtré maṇigaṇā iva* is amplified and illustrated here. Verses 12-14 describe how the Lord is the life of all the lives, the sustainer and the essence, even with regard to all natural phenomena and vital functions.

Verse 15 sums up the foregoing. It also harmonizes various statements made about the Vedas in chapter II, 42, 45, 46 and other places. It declares 'The Lord is everything in everything.' He is the highest knowledge.

Verses 16-20 give in a nutshell the doctrine of *Purushottama* and the importance of this concept. Even the *Purushottama yoga* is only one more insistence on the central doctrine '*Yogi bhava*'. For verse 19 says, 'The man of true insight worships the Lord with all his mind in all possible ways.' Who else but a true Yogi can rise to this full height? Notice the phrase '*sarva bhāvéna*' both in ch. XV, 19 and ch. XVIII, 62.

38. GODLY (VIRTUOUS) ACTIVITY LIBERATES, DEMONICAL ENSLAVES

Daivī sampat vimōkshāya

What outlook and temperament engulfs man in the quagmire of *samsāra* and which liberates him is taken up for elucidation in chapter sixteen. The first three verses constitute another variant of the now very familiar picture of the ideal or perfect man. Perhaps this is the sixth time we come across such description. In the musical translation of the Gita by Sir Edwin Arnold, we have it as:

'Fearlessness, singleness of soul, the will
Always to strive for wisdom; opened hand
And governed appetites; and piety,
And love of lonely study; humbleness,
Uprightness, heed to injure naught which lives,
Truthfulness, slowness unto wrath, a mind
That lightly letteth go what others prize;
And equanimity, and charity
Which spieth no man's faults; and tenderness
Towards all that suffer; a contented heart
Fluttered by no desires; a bearing mild,
Modest, and grave, with manhood nobly mixed,
With patience, fortitude and purity;
An unrevengeful spirit never given
To rate itself too high;'

—*Song Celestial*

The basic virtue, you will notice is 'fearlessness'. Nothing great is possible, least of all the conquest of the self, to one that is dominated by fear. Next to fear man's greatest obstacle is ignorance. Other enemies of spiritual progress are, our appetites, the blind rage that follows if these are checked, and pride.

Verses 4-17 describe the Asuric or materialistic outlook and temperament. Needless to say that it is the root of all bondage to the round of births and deaths. You cannot imagine a more fitting, vivid and exact picture, with all details and colours, of the outlook of the modern man whatsoever be the creed and faith he professes. The last great war was the inevitable result of such an outlook. All the modern machinery at the disposal of the State, open and covert organization and propaganda, are all utilized for the furtherance of this cult. Both the last two world wars, have apparently failed, and even a dozen such wars more may fail, to chasten or sober the world's greed for possessions for any long period of time. The present conditions are favourable for self-seeking exploiters and it pays them to swear by this cult, posing as so many protagonists of new eras and millenniums. The labels might vary but their aim is the same, viz. to destroy the existing order by ruthless violence. But violence always begets violence and we are moving in a vicious circle of tragedy begetting tragedy on a gigantic or cosmic scale. The second World War is a most striking illustration. You notice Stalin preaching Leninism; Hitler forging a new humanity; Roosevelt and Churchill promising a new world order—all by destroying and enslaving mighty nations and races. The present is horrible enough. The future is a vain dream. This is but a modern version of the most ancient cult of Hiranya or as it is called *Asura sampat* in these verses.

There are many Iagos in every walk of life, Iago standing for motiveless malignity. The doom of all such hateful and devilish creatures is stated by the Lord in the next three verses (18-20). The Lord punishes evildoers out of His infinite mercy for them. He points out

that hell and its opposite pictured vividly and luridly in all puranas and scriptures, etc. are but the effects of man's thoughts and doings. We alone are responsible for these. Our bed is soft or otherwise exactly as we make it. If in following the wise path indicated by the Lord throughout the Gita, we can but avoid the three trapdoors to Hell, viz. *Kāma, Krodha, Lobha* (lust, anger and greed), eternal happiness is assured for us.

The sastras mentioned in chapter VI verse 24 as the sure guide is not any particular code or text-book of morals and conduct but the Lord's own teachings contained in the Gita, Bhagavatam or the example of his incarnations from time to time. Sri Ramakrishna has summed up all these teachings and the quintessence of all the sastras in the famous saying that attachment to *Kāminī Kāncana* is *Samsāra*, and renouncing them thoroughly in word, deed and thought is the surest way to salvation, peace and blessedness. Those who do not follow and practise the examples and teachings of the Lord (Sastras) but are carried away by their desires cannot find any real peace or happiness either here or hereafter. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Keep your heart at the Lotus feet of the Lord and with your hands and limbs do your allotted work as a worship unto Him.'

In conclusion we may note that Devas and Asuras only stand for different types of mind or outlook on life. The essence and keynote of the former outlook is the surrender of one's will to God and becoming His instrument absolutely and perfectly. The latter typifies self-reliance, self-exertion and self-aggrandisement or in a word self-glorification to the exclusion and denial of God. Self-reliance and self-exertion are very good and necessary but enthroning our little self and making it a supreme end in itself at the expense of denying God

and denying the welfare of humanity is the root of all evil. The former may be abused as giving room for laziness, lethargy, inertia and pseudo or false surrender. The Devas as familiar to us in the Puranas do not always appear as worthy examples to follow.

39. THREE-FOLD ARE THEY

Trividhā bhavati

Chapter seventeen deals with the working of the three gunas in such departments of life and activity as faith (*Śraddhā*), food, sacrifices and gifts. For the most comprehensive classification of the innumerable varieties, shades of temperament and outlook of the entire humanity we are indebted to the *Sānkhya* school with its doctrine of *Prakṛti* with its three gunas, *sātwa, rājasa, tāmasa* (pure and calm; active and violent; inertia, dullness). Of course, there may be various mixtures of these three in different proportions and combinations but ultimately they could be reduced to these three distinct types or modes. It is noteworthy that these three gunas and qualities can be ascended from the lower to the higher and ultimately transcended by a true Yogi who works in a spirit of dedication without any expectation of results or rewards.

The description of various classes and types is as clear, vivid, fresh and modern as may be desired. I would draw your attention to the category '*tapas*'. The Lord in the Gita widens its scope, range or application almost infinitely. You may remember *Yajña* or sacrifice was also similarly treated in an earlier chapter. In our puranas you will often read of *Tapas* or penances performed for thousands of years in the most hazardous

manner and with unimaginable rigours. Very often the performers of these severe austerities or penances are daityas or asuras and by their very one-pointed devotion they seem to compel, as it were, the gods to confer their desired boons. But such descriptions evoke only incredulity and strike as fantastic.

I challenge you to pick any hole in the description of '*tapas*' as the Lord Sri Krishna interprets it in verses 14-16 regarding body, speech and mind. They are needed always and more so at the present day. Unless humanity tries to follow these in every department of life to the best of its capacity, conditions in the world are bound to grow worse day by day and ultimately lead to an insufferable, unrelieved, veritable Hell.

The remaining verses sum up neatly and beautifully all these various acts and their classifications, especially the part we are called upon to play with regard to any or all of these. In the first place every conceivable activity of human life is to be performed as a sacrifice. Secondly these should be performed for their own sake without any expectation of rewards, results and fruits. Finally whatever fruits or results there be, these all must be offered at the Lotus feet of the Lord and enjoyed as His gift and grace, as *prasādam* or consecrated blessing. You would easily recall Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda Swamiji's teaching *Seva* of *Jiva* as the *Seva* of *Śiva*, or of regarding work as worship. These two small phrases are not understood properly and in their full import because of their brevity and beauty. It seems to me that they indicate the new or future order or the era to come. It is nothing new but only a modern version of the most early eternal teaching of the Vedas:

'*Iśāvāsyam idam sarvam . . . . . .*'

You have to spiritualize business, industry and even politics which is considered by all as a very dirty game. That is the unmistakable intention of the Lord will become patent in the sequel and the final charge or summing up to Arjuna in the next chapter which deserves to be examined, closely and carefully.

40. NOT TO BE SHIRKED; TO BE PERFORMED

Na tyājyam kāryaméva

Chapter eighteen being the last, you should naturally expect a summing up of the Lord's teaching in the Gita. The way of release from *Samsāra* has been explained to Arjuna from various points of view in all the previous chapters. Therefore, the one topic or teaching which has led to endless controversies or misunderstandings, viz. the meaning of *Sanyāsa* is taken up at the outset and is explained in such a simple manner as to rule out all possible doubts. Yet if people choose to twist or misinterpret it, we can only say, (and find consolation in the truth) that none are so blind as those who refuse to see.

In the first verse, Arjuna asks what is the true import of *Sanyāsa* and *Tyāga* and the reply in verse 2 is very clear. *Sanyāsa* is giving up all acts motived by desire and *Tyāga* is the abandonment of the fruits of all actions. Please recall in chapter VI verse 1, '*Anāśritah Karma phalam.*'

A *sanyāsi* is described as one who *performs actions* but without the least taint of expectation of fruits or results. The goal placed before such a person is '*sarva sankalpa sanyāsa*' which means surrendering his will,

desire and action, at the feet of the Lord. So the Lord's reply is but a re-statement of the central teaching, '*Yogi bhava.*'

Verse 3 refers to one view about Karma or action which says that all work should be abandoned as ultimate evil while another view is that some work should be performed. Lest this be misunderstood the Lord at once warns in verse 5 that *yajña, dāna, tapas, karma* (sacrifices, gifts, and tapas, etc.) ought to be performed as helping man in purifying his mind and on no account should be abandoned.

In verse 6 He states emphatically and categorically that His view is that these acts ought to be performed without attachment or expectation of the fruits. The words '*niścitam*' and '*uttamam matam*' are full of significance. It is worthy of note that these three terms *yajña, dāna, tapas,* are often on the lips of the Lord. Because they are not only most vital but also they sum up every form of human endeavour on earth. He indicates, in that spirit and light, these ought to be performed. Every act should ultimately be done as a sacrifice or *tapas* or worship and dedication to the Lord. This point though simple is missed if we pay too much attention to the philosophical import of the teachings. Every teaching must naturally be based upon some definite philosophical outlook or system, but philosophy as such is not the end and aim of life. It must colour our life, transform it or lead us to the goal. Hence the fulfilment of philosophy is the practical consequence of the teaching. It must teach us the best way of living so that we may reap the largest and richest harvest on earth.

Verses 7, 8 and 9 deserve special attention. I have already told you that many educated persons with western ideas and outlook hate the very word renunciation.

They do not confess the real truth, viz. that their minds hanker after all sorts of worldly pleasures and enjoyments. But they attack renunciation for its 'dangerous' and 'anti-social' implications. They argue that any person with a lazy and shirking temperament can run away from the post of duty and putting on the external garb of renunciation become a burden on others or be a social parasite. I have heard people quoting the census reports, which classify all beggars as sadhus, fakirs, etc. and ask with meaningful derision whether sixty lakhs or more are not too many to be genuine, whether these are not a drag upon the society and whether they do not exploit the poor masses, etc. The Gita gives an effective answer to such confused thinking. Verse 7 clearly points out that no one should abandon his prescribed duties and any person who gives up these with a pretence of *Sanyāsa* only betrays his utter ignorance of the meaning of renunciation. Even those who renounce their duties on the ground of sorrow or out of fear or trouble or pain to body and mind cannot claim the merit of true renunciation. Only those who go on performing their duties without in the least being influenced by any attachment to the fruits or rewards are of the genuine or satwic type. This point is of vital importance to the central teaching of the Gita—at the very outset it is raised by Arjuna's question and answered by Sri Krishna and brought up here again and clarified once more to remove all possible trace of lingering doubt. Duty must be done for its own sake. Attachments and fruits must not be allowed to intrude. Would to God that everyone in the world practises true renunciation as taught in the Gita!

Verses 7-11 once more emphasize that on no account should good and beneficent acts be abandoned. They

should be performed as a supreme duty or as the privilege of a true Yogi.

In the next six verses (12-17), the Lord examines all possible doubts bearing upon the supreme goal, viz. being a true Yogi. Fruits of action can only be good, bad or indifferent. These do not affect in the least the true *Sanyāsi* or *Yogi*, but exist for the 'bound' or those that work with motives or desires. An understanding of the true nature of the machinery and the various elements that are involved in the accomplishment of any act is desirable and the Lord examines this important question next. The *Sānkhya* system or the philosophy accepted by the Lord in the Gita recognizes five elements or factors, viz. body, doer or agent, instruments or the organs, various operations and attempts in the direction and the divine factor. This is the ultimate analysis of all activities performed through body, speech or mind. On the basis of this analysis of the various factors that contribute towards the accomplishment of any act there is no room for the popular and vulgar fallacy 'I am the doer'. Recall chapter III, verse 27 which gives briefly this very analysis using the word *Prakṛti* to comprehend all these factors. There the Lord calls the person who thinks he is doer as a veritable fool deluded by *ahankāra* (egoism).

This detailed analysis of *Prakṛti* into the several factors is made to give the death blow to Arjuna's fear about his own authorship and responsibility for the various acts involved in the battle and the sin and life in hell accruing to him as the inevitable consequence. You will see that at the end of this chapter in verse 59 the Lord once more refers to this apparently ineradicable and inherent illusion of man (for this is the essence of *māyā*) and repeats that *Prakṛti* will have her way

whether we like it or not. The only way of escape therefore is not to be caught in the meshes of these five factors or dramatic personae but be mere dispassionate witness. Hence the Lord says in verse 17, 'The person who is free from the notion of "I" or doership is not affected or bound by the consequence of any action constituting the play of *Prakṛti* with its five-fold factors or limbs.'

Whether you accept the above analysis according to *Sānkhya* or not there can be only these three classes of persons *Sātwa*, *Rājasa* and *Tāmasa* described in verses 18-35. The Lord goes into the minutest detail of the various factors that relate to any work and its performer. The Satwic type of the five categories, viz. knowledge, action, actor, *buddhi* (intelligence), *dhṛti* (firmness) mentioned in the verses describe and give an exact picture of a true Yogi while the Rajasic and Tamasic type constitute those bound by *Samsāra* that is the general run of mankind. Verses 36-39 describe three types of happiness. Verse 40 tells us that the above analysis of *Prakṛti* or Nature detailed from various points of view includes every bit of the universe and nothing exists outside its domain or jurisdiction.

41. CONCENTRATE YOUR MIND ON ME ALONE

Mat cittam satatam bhava

The Lord now tackles the question of how these three gunas operate among our fellowmen.

Verses 41-44 continue the classification according to gunas in the human and social order. The following has nothing to do with the caste as a social institution. Today the caste is an anachronism. It has outlived its

purpose. It is an encumbrance and a stumbling block. The sooner it is mended or ended, the better for all concerned. What the Lord here teaches is the natural division of persons into broad types based on inherent qualities, tendencies, *samskāras* and outlook. Take the Brahmin for instance. Notice what the Lord says. Not even a single one of the nine characteristics named by Sri Krishna can be claimed as a monopoly of the caste known by that name. These characteristics are found in individuals in every class of society, irrespective of the conventional castes or labels. So too with all the other classes and qualities named. You may search anywhere and everywhere in vain to find any particular individual, answering to this description. Some people are fond of saying that all are Sudras. Even this characteristic is only conspicuous by its absence. Service with the expectation of maximum pay, prospects and emoluments and with minimum trouble or exertion is not the same as '*paricarya*' which the Lord lays down as the characteristic of the Sudra. Perhaps at some time in the future these four classes may come into existence throughout the world. Then this division will not be one of birth but will cut through all the strata of society. Another noteworthy and striking feature of the Lord's description of the four classes is that not even a trace of any privilege, or any claim of prestige or power or superiority for any one class is indicated even by implication. Verses 45-48 form the most natural corollary of the broad outlook exhibited in the definition of the various classes. As one cannot jump out of oneself, one cannot escape the natural bent and inclination of one's nature. But whatever may be the particular function through which the nature of any individual best expresses itself, that is his duty. The discharging of this duty to the best of his

ability without attachment or expectation of reward will lead him to the highest goal. What is one man's meal is another man's poison. No particular field of work can be imagined which is wholly free from defect. As the Lord puts it beautifully, 'Just as every fire emits smoke, every conceivable form of activity is bound to have some kind of defect or evil inherent in its nature. Therefore no one need or ought to give up his own duty on the ground that it involves evil.' Recall chapter III verse 35. The Gita ideal and the modern Socialist goal present a very interesting comparison. The Gita teaches, 'every man to do his very best to help Society.' The Socialist echoes the same thing when he declares, 'From every man according to his might.' The Gita promises the highest happiness as the reward while the Socialist promises 'to every man according to his needs.' I leave you to judge the merits of these two ideals.

Verse 49 deserves special attention. Three conditions are stated as vital.

(1) detached outlook, free from all loves and fears,
(2) complete conquest of one's self or lower nature,
(3) total absence of any taste and desire for enjoyment.

Only when these three are all present, is a person's life one of true *Sanyāsa* and though performing acts he never gets bound to the wheels of *Samsāra*. Recall chapter IV verse 14 and IV-18.

Verses 50-57 form a grand summary. All the teachings that deserve to be treasured up and put into practice every moment of our lives we have in these verses. All the definitions of an Ideal man beginning with *Sthitaprajña, Yogi, Bhakta, Guṇātīta,* etc. are here epitomized and the final fruit or fulfilment is indicated in the most unmistakable terms.

Verse 57 gives the final advice. It is the Lord's own definition of '*Yogi bhava*'. Even the last lingering doubt is blown up by a solemn categorical assurance that in our honest pursuit of this noble ideal, we shall easily overcome all difficulties by His Grace. If we cannot have faith in this assurance and the almost ineradicable little ego yet persists and yet wants to follow perversely its own endless desires contrary to this loving, kind advice, the Lord points out the terrible catastrophe that awaits this fool guided by pride. As if by way of reply to Arjuna's initial refusal to fight, the Lord points out (in verses 59 and 60) to him that his position is untenable as he is but an instrument in His hands. Through his nature he will have no other go but to fight and fulfil the Lord's preordained purpose. For as the Lord has revealed to Arjuna in chapter XI He has already killed all these warriors and Arjuna is advised to be '*nimittamātram.*'

The next verse (61) states an eternal truth. In spite of all our pride, egoism, vanity, ambitious plans and schemes, the real fountain head of energy and direction makes us all swing round to fulfil His purpose even as the driver seated at the wheel turns the machine right or left to suit his purpose. That we are not able to see this hidden but sure divine hand is the real *māyā*, veil or cosmic illusion.

Therefore it is our bounden duty to take shelter under His Lotus feet or surrender our little will unto His Will abandoning all our personal impulses and inclination with the one constant desire to be His instrument and serve His purpose. Then there is no fear nor room for doubt about our attaining the supreme and eternal bliss or salvation.

Verse 63 deserves special mention. As a kind and true friend the Lord has taught all humanity through

Arjuna the most profound and sacred truth. In the truly scientific spirit He asks us all to examine this teaching thoroughly, considering all the pros and cons and choose what convinces us. Exercise your reasoning powers calmly and steadily. Consider all the arguments in a dispassionate manner in the true scientific spirit; and if you still find the Lord's advice unacceptable He gives you leave to choose your own path.

42. TAKE SHELTER IN ME ALONE

Māmékam śaraṇam vraja

So far the Lord has explained to Arjuna with infinite patience and complete details how one could live in this world and go through the whole round of duties without being caught in the wheels of *samsāra* or the cycle of births and deaths. He granted to him the divine vision so that he may have an actual experience of the Lord's glory and greatness which very few are privileged to know. Out of His infinite love and intimate friendship for Arjuna, the Lord gives him the final advice and the most secret of all secrets in the next two verses.

Verses 65 and 66 constitute the divine Magna Carta of liberation or salvation to all humanity. This is not like any royal proclamation nor political pacts and manifestos which are broken, misused and explained away even before the ink on the paper gets dry. The Lord however wants us to have our minds wholly and always fixed on Him, to be devoted to Him, to perform all works as worship to Him, accept Him as the Supreme Master, paying homage to Him only. Then He promises solemnly that we shall attain to Him without the least doubt and there is no question of failure. What more

encouraging, soothing, inspiring, assuring words can you imagine than these: 'I free and absolve you from all sins. Do not grieve. Take shelter in Me alone abandoning all *Dharmas*.' We are asked to give up all *Dharmas* and take shelter in the Lord alone. Are we to sit idly with folded hands? Is it at all possible? What we ought to do is taught in verse 65.

This is the last word in the Gita: the Lord's final instruction, the most sublime secret of all. A special doctrine has grown out of this in the Sri Vaishnava cult. It is that of *Prapatti* or Self-surrender. You have stipulated that no subtle philosophy must be brought in these letters. If you are interested in this doctrine I must refer to the innumerable scriptures concerned. It is enough for our purpose to emphasize that the essence of the doctrine is this: (1) All reliance on any type of earthly possession should be given up completely. (2) We should not entertain any thought of penances, ritual or other similar *sādhanas* as a means to salvation.

We may however desire to sing His praises, long for His company and serve His devotees. Our desire for ordinary worldly things brings on bondage. Similarly will not our desire for the Lotus feet of the Lord also become a source of bondage because it is also a desire? 'No,' is the answer. A seed sprouts and grows into a plant or tree and bears fruit in time. But if the seed is well fried it will not germinate although to all outward appearance it is like any other seed. The *Yoga Sūtras* use this very simile. Very often even those who ought to know better ask us, 'Is not desire for one's liberation a desire and selfishness?' It is forgotten that the 'desire' in this case aims at killing the self altogether or transcending or merging it in the ultimate self, i.e. transcending desire, self and selfishness. You may recall Sri

Ramakrishna's saying: 'The desire for liberation and for God realization is not to be counted as ordinary desire, even as sugarcandy is not like any other sweet nor *hince sāg* like any other *sāg*.' Sri Krishna in His assurance to the cowherd maidens sets at rest all doubt concerning this matter. See Srimad Bhagavatam, X—22-26:

Na mayyāveśitadhiyām kāmah kāmāya kalpate
Bharjitā kāthitādhānā prāyô vījāya neshyate

As the previous verse points out, our whole life and its numerous forms of activities and interests should all centre round and be directed to the Lord and the Lord alone. He must become our all-in all, the end as well as the means. When such absorbing interest takes possession of our minds to the exclusion of every other, liberation, salvation, and supreme happiness are already attained. This is what the Lord means by asking us to abandon all *Dharma*. Life becomes one of serene bliss. For outward purposes we may occupy any station in life and be doing its prescribed round of duties. This teaching cannot be appreciated until and unless one is convinced beyond any shadow of doubt that this world is *anityam* and *asukham*.

As a bird, having its perch upon the mast-head of a ship in mid-ocean, gets tired of its position, flies away to discover a new place of rest but, without finding any, returns at last to its old roost upon the mast-head, weary and exhausted, so an ordinary aspirant is sure *at last* to return to the old Master (Sri Krishna) for His blessings and grace after such fruitless exertion.

We must be fully convinced that all other supports or means or *sādhanas* are of no avail and that the Lord is the only sure and certain means of salvation. This is

the condition or implication of what follows in verses 67-72. No one relishes any dish when his stomach is full. So if we are hankering after the pleasures of the world and running in mad pursuit of this or that enjoyment, the Gita does not become a practical science. It has no living contact or relation with our lives. We shall then be approaching and understanding this teaching only through the intellect. Our doubts and misgivings will be endless. Faith and devotion come only when our mind is purified, calm and free from all surging passions. Even if we cannot believe with a firm faith let us at least refrain from cavilling or arrogant and ignorant criticism. As the Lord said to Arjuna in ch. XVIII, 63, take a scientific attitude, examine the problem from all points of view, weighing all the pros and cons and hold fast to what you think is true. But there must be the reverent enquiry of an open mind.

This is a scripture or a dialogue which took place some thousands of years ago. The language, the modes of thought and the figures of speech all present a picture of the age in which it sprang. What matters to us at the present day is the essence, the spirit of these teachings. Humanity is in a quandary. All the boasted achievements of civilization and science have not made the vast majority of us decent human beings. Science has taught us to fly like birds and swim like fishes. We have yet to learn how to live on earth like decent human beings and as brothers to fellowmen. If we do not refuse to see what is plain, we can get ample help, guidance and inspiration in the Lord's teaching, help enough to make this earth of ours a veritable heaven. Let us pray, be humble, and be guided by the supreme wisdom of the Lord's teachings even as Arjuna declares in the next verse. Let us hope that our delusions will

vanish and all doubts disappear and we can honestly declare, 'Thy will be done O! Lord.'

This will become very easy and natural if we realize the truth as Appar sings in his *Tevāram*:

> Who can refuse to dance if He makes us dance,
> Who can refuse to be calm and controlled if He makes us so,
> Who can refuse to run if He makes us run,
> Whose heart will not melt if He directs it so,
> Who will not sing if He bids us sing,
> Who will not bow down and worship Him if He wills it so,
> Who will not realize Him if He reveals Himself and
> Who can see Him if He is not gracious and pleased to show Himself?

It forms an eloquent exposition of Arjuna's brief reply, 'I shall carry out Thy bidding.' We can all attempt to reach this state of mind and the Lord Himself has suggested different stages in this attempt and ascent. (Chapter XII, verses 9-12.)

The rest of the verses are just the concluding ones. The very last one is typical in that it suggests that the Lord as the *Yogeśwara* and Arjuna as the representative man are eternal verities and in this sacred teaching there is no falsehood nor failure in the true aspirant's effort. Even an attempt in the direction is a beginning of success, step towards further progress.

You now see that Sri Ramakrishna's 'one word commentary', viz. *Tyāgī* (*Tyāga*, renunciation) is the very essence of this last and final teaching of Sri Krishna.

43. THE ACT OF SELF-SURRENDER—REVIEW

The act of self-surrender is very simple as all other great truths are found to be. Yet its implication is not always fully realized by all of us. We must examine this more carefully. *Śaraṇāgati* consists of two parts, a positive and a negative aspect. Before real *Śaraṇam* is possible *all other Dharma* must be abandoned. What does this mean? Let us analyse how all of us normally think and act.

Sri Ramakrishna the moment he heard 'God is everything and all others nothing' or 'God realization is the only end and aim of life', scrupulously and mercilessly abandoned everything, that we hold dear, cut asunder all bonds or so-called softer feelings and plunged his mind day and night in the one search for God. He did not care for studies nor for earning name or fame. Hence the pre-requisite has been stated as abandonment of *all Dharma*. I believe this word *Dharma* has not merely sacerdotal or religious significance. It may be interpreted as 'everything that supports' (our life existence), the root meaning being *Dhārayati iti Dharma*. People generally consider land, home, bank balance, wife, children, relatives and friends as supports or sources of enjoyment and satisfaction in life. This is no doubt true so far as bodily existence and worldly life are concerned. But these are not at all helpful in any way to God realization. On the other hand these supports bind and entangle us in *Samsāra* or the cycle of births and deaths.

Thiruvalluvar puts this very tersely using the word attachment six times in a small couplet.

'In order to get rid of all worldly attachments, attach yourself to Him who is free and above all

attachment; the implication being that He alone is the true and only support in life.'

The positive aspect of '*Śaraṇam vraja*' has got an ever expanding, ever increasing, ever deepening or penetrating significance from gross to subtle, from subtle to the entire body or mind with all its sub-conscious or super-conscious level. Here again Sri Ramakrishna's life throws much light. I need not single out any particular act or incident as his whole life is a picture of this principle of *Śaraṇāgata* at work. That the Gita considers this aspect as the most vital and supreme teaching of discipline could be inferred from the fact that not only in ch. XVIII-65 but in ch. IX-34, XI-55 and XII-8, etc. this very truth is adverted to again and again. *Śaraṇāgata* does not mean a chloroforming of our conscience or acting as a libertine recklessly and in a most irresponsible manner, pretending to pass on all the blame on God. When this act of surrender is cent per cent true and genuine, all attachments and clingings are cut asunder. The mind in all its aspects becomes aglow with a super abundance of energy and intensity. Then and then alone is it possible to translate into everyday life and action the teaching, '*manmanā bhava*', etc. So '*Yogi bhava*,' 'Live and act so as not to be caught in the world', 'Direct your mind to God', 'Love Him and Him alone', 'Sacrifice unto Him,'—all teach (complementing and supplementing) one and the same thing. There is no path or yoga which does not fall under one or the other of this comprehensive scheme or *sādhana* or way of living. It does not matter in the least what particular school of Vedanta appeals to your intellect. It does not alter the situation if you belong to any one of the innumerable sects known and functioning in the wide domain of Indian spiritual culture. We might go even further and say that a

Buddhist, a Jain, a Christian, a Muslim, or a so-called atheist, agnostic, materialist, or any one else for the matter of that has only this alternative before him. He must serve either God or Mammon as all life is serving and acting. There is no half-way house or a third alternative. Perhaps this is the true significance of Sri Ramakrishna the latest avatar practising all these religions and realizing their inner harmony and identity.

Men are minds functioning in different loci. There are minds which are wholly functioning at the animal level. The Sanskrit saying *Manushya rupeṇa mṛgāh caranti* is but an actual everyday experience. When the beast in man is domesticated there is the dawn of the higher instincts and life in the truly human plane begins. Then you have altruistic motives and considerations ruling the mind although the animal functions are not abolished altogether. At still higher levels we come across saintly lives whose sole interest and motive is to realize God as inherent and manifested in the humanity at large. You may wonder how such self-sublimation is possible. We are all familiar with the phenomena of the human mother forgetting her food, sleep, rest and other bodily wants when her own dear child is dangerously ill. Such a self-forgetfulness comes temporarily to everyone when somebody near and dear is dead. Conversely when the mind is filled with an intense pleasurable feeling or emotion a similar condition is induced. Extend this principle to a still higher pitch, you get an exalted state of mind known as '*Samādhi*'.

God is infinite bliss. If the mind could be absorbed in God the fountain head of bliss and joy, other lesser (material, gross and sensuous) wants are psychologically impossible. But the modern mind full of lower impulses and clingings cannot conceive even as a remote

possibility of such an exaltation or absorption. The opinion of the majority whatever be the numerical vastness of it proves nothing. Even if one in a million demonstrates this possibility beyond doubt, scientific attitude demands that it should be accepted as a practical ideal. Sri Ramakrishna teaches that a purified mind and the omnipotent *ātman* are identical (*Śuddha man* and *Śuddha ātman*). Another teaching of his is that the highest spiritual realization is *jñānam* or wisdom *par excellence*. The realization of this divinity inherent in every bit of the universe or the living realization of the omnipenetrativeness of God is spoken of by him as *vijñānam, viśesharūpa jñānam* or wisdom in a special or complete form. In some such light one must understand the Lord's teaching in the Gita that those that know Him truly are never bound. Also it must be remembered that knowing Him truly is realizing Him or sharing in His glory and joy. So the doctrine of *Śaraṇāgata* has nothing to do with the gospel of idleness, indifference and reckless drift. It is positive surrender of self in an ever widening circle of interests and experiences. The final goal is the same as *Nirvikalpa Samādhi* of the *Vedānta, Kaivalya* of the *Sānkhya* or 'becoming established in the Kingdom of Heaven.' The language alone is different but the ultimate teaching is the same.

44. GITA COMMANDMENTS

All the great world teachers have to break new ground. They all possess sufficient boldness of spirit. They do not mince matters. They are conscious of their mission in life. They therefore say what they have to say without fear or favour. They do not beat about the bush.

They are never content with producing a mass of verbiage. Their teachings are simple and direct. Nobody can mistake the spirit or implication. They are like military commands so brief and yet so forceful.

I have been struck with the remarkable fact that there is no vagueness or ambiguity in the teaching of the Gita. Just look at these commandments as I call them. The first and most important one occurs in the very first words which the Lord utters to Arjuna, (chapter II, verses 2 and 3) '*Kshudram hṛdaya daurbalyam tyaktvottishṭha Parantapa*' 'Awake, arise (stand up) shaking off this cowardice.' Can anything be more plain and direct? This the first commandment of the Gita contains in itself all that follows. Weakness of any kind is the root of all evil. It is the fountain head from which springs all cruelty, oppression, exploitation and injustice of every kind. It is the mother of sins. Hence the Lord's emphasis on this vital aspect. Conversely if you have strength of body, mind and spirit, you possess all virtues already. Perhaps you know the term virtue comes from the root 'virus' strength. We must therefore conquer all forms of weaknesses. You know the proverb 'Speak the truth and shame the devil.' Cowards are notorious liars. It never enters into the head of the strong man to speak a lie even to save himself. Satan therefore is only another name for weakness, cowardice, in short *hṛdaya daurbalyam.* Swami Vivekananda declares that the secret and essence of the whole Gita lies embedded in this one verse (chapter II, 3). He says strength, strength is the message of the Upanishads and the Gita.

In this world of ours, we often have to suffer in many ways and forms cold, hunger, accidents, sickness, old age and finally death. These (and their opposites however pleasant and welcome) last but for a short time.

They unnerve and enslave men. They originate from the contact of the sense organs. The next and the second commandment of the Lord is therefore *tām titikshasva* (chapter II, verse 14), i.e. suffer them to come and go. It is the height of folly to allow these sense impressions to disturb the serenity of our soul or self. Be a witness and enjoy the play even in our own cases.

There is one danger against which we must always be on our guard. The second commandment is liable to a very dangerous misinterpretation. Lazy and cowardly persons might turn it into a gospel of idleness or sloth and inactivity. So the Lord thunders forth in another commandment *niyatam kuru karmatvam* (chapter III, verse 8), 'Do then, thy appointed duty, or Fight on at thy post.' Under no circumstance, inertia or passivity ought to be countenanced or encouraged. The Gita emphatically repudiates the philosophy of the lotus eaters. It must be remembered at the same time that we are not to work like galley slaves or with an eye for reward or name and fame. If we do so, we are sure to get bound.

Another commandment is this *yajñārthātkarmaṇoanyatralokoayam karmabandhanah* (chapter III, verse 9). 'Man is bound by the shackles of karma only when engaged in actions other than work performed as sacrifice. Therefore do all work as sacrifice.' It puts the matter clearly and hits the nail on its head. We are asked to do all work as sacrifice or as a worship of God and being completely free and devoid of all attachments. Under all other conditions work binds.

To reinforce the merit of this command the Lord quotes his own example as well as those of Janaka and other realized souls. We are commanded to follow their lead and perform all work even for the welfare of humanity. *Lokasangrahamevāpi* (chapter III, verse 20). It comes

to the same thing whether we call it sacrifice (worship of the Lord) or for the good of humanity and the solidarity of the human race.

Another form of weakness which the devil assumes is doubt. We are commanded therefore next to kill this Demon by the sword of Wisdom (chapter IV, verse 42) and go ahead, for the doubter can never hope for joy and happiness here or hereafter.

You will be able to pick up easily a score or two of such commandments. I shall end this letter by drawing your attention to only three more which I consider to contain the quintessence of them all. The next one I would refer to is *tasmāt yogībhavārjuna.* 'Therefore do thou become a Yogi.' (VI, 46). I shall not say anything more on this as enough has been written already. Please remember the two characteristic observations of the Gita about Yoga, one points out that it is true skill or dexterity in action (II, 50), *yogah karmasu kauśalam.* Because this alone frees us from all bondages of action. This dexterity becomes perfect as we achieve perfect equanimity or serenity of mind under all conditions and circumstances. Hence *samatvam yoga ucyate nimittamātram bhava.* The next commandment is 'Be thou a mere instrument.' This is possible only through perfect Yoga. All egoism must vanish. To serve His Will must yield full and complete satisfaction. This comes automatically if we have a living faith in His infinite solicitude for the true welfare of humanity.

The final commandment *māmekām śaraṇamvraja* 'Seek refuge in Me alone' is the true expression of such a faith. I have devoted more than one letter for this special teaching. When all attachments are given up or lose their taste or flavour the mind will naturally cling to the Lotus Feet of the Lord. The child is busy playing with

its toys. It does not recognize the mother even when she passes before its very eyes. Nor does it listen to the call of the mother. But the moment hunger is felt, toys are thrown away, play and playmates are abandoned. The child dashes off to the mother and knows no peace or joy till it securely sleeps in its mother's lap. We are all playing with many toys such as University degrees, titles, wealth, family, name, fame and even schemes of reform. Therefore we do not feel the hunger for everlasting peace and happiness. But all the same the play will come to an end and hunger will be felt sooner or later. Then this final commandment will ring in our ears hope, strength and inspiration and we cannot rest till we fulfil this in both letter and spirit.

POSTSCRIPT TO LETTER No. 13

In our country, even forty or fifty years ago the mother of the family of every Hindu home was a living embodiment and a glorious example of this central teaching of the Gita. I have so often told you about my own dear mother and sister who were a unique combination of utter selflessness, transparent sincerity and perfect readiness to serve and comfort others. They would even forego their meals and sleep when a neighbour needed their services. From early dawn till late in the night they could be found busy at work of every kind from cleaning and sweeping the floor, cooking and serving food and nursing the sick in the family or others in the village. You could always hear them singing devotional songs and hymns with fervour and sweetness even whilst they are working. Their hearts and minds were fixed at the lotus feet of the Lord, while their limbs

were ever active and busy in serving and bringing joy and comfort to others. I have no doubt, they were, though unconsciously, practising true Yoga as taught in the Gita. Even today elderly people brought up in the old tradition of our ancestors do approach this ideal in their own humble ways and especially, the aged mothers of many families throughout the length and breadth of this ancient land truly illustrate this ideal of the central teaching '*Yogi bhava*'. It is up to you, and I pray that you may succeed in the fullest measure, to practise this code everyday and in everything that you do to realize this central teaching of the Gita.

Appendix

GITA AND NON-VIOLENCE

The most cardinal teaching of the Gita is non-violence in the highest and truest sense of the term. *Ahimsa* as *paramo dharma* cannot be merely a negative concept. It is nothing but pure and unconditional love. According to the Gita, hatred and violence breeds more hatred and more violence. The entire history of humanity up to date emphasizes eloquently this very sad and tragic truth.

You might point out that the conclusion that the Gita is opposed to violence is contrary to fact. The Lord teaches Arjuna in the Gita to fight his enemies, kill them and conquer them and not to practise *ahimsā* in any sense of the term. Not only you but many people point out that the Gita sanctions and justifies war. Apparently this argument seems to be conclusive and irrefutable. Strictly speaking the Gita is not a gospel of war or violence. It only enjoins every one to perform his Swadharma. In modern times even in the country of its origin, Varnasrama Dharma is not functioning as it was conceived during the age of Mahabharata or of the Bhagavadgita. There is no comparison or similarity between the war of those days and our modern scientific mechanized Naval and Aerial warfare, not to speak of V-1, V-2 and atomic bombs. This latter is a wholesale indiscriminate massacre of innocent people on a gigantic scale, but the war of the Mahabharata times was a trial of strength between two opposing armies gathered on a battle-field away from the peaceful walks of life. There were strict rules or code of conduct regulating

this battle. All the teachings of the Gita in this respect come to this only. In special, well-defined and exceptional circumstances it becomes the duty of a Kshatriya to punish the evil-doers by killing them in battle if there were no other means of enforcing the right. Even in this sense, he is not expected to harbour any feeling of ill-will or hatred towards the wrong-doer. He has to fight the battle out of mere sense of duty.

If you do not take this interpretation as correct, you cannot reconcile or harmonize the numerous definite and categorical injunctions regulating our highest duty. You have only to recall the numerous characteristics of a *Sthitaprajña, Yogi,* or an ideal or perfect man.

I have told you, in an earlier letter, how Mahatma Gandhi is a living example of the Gita Yogi. He has made a life-long study of this poem and what is much more to the point, has put this teaching into practice with conspicuous success.

I shall therefore conclude by quoting Mahatma Gandhi's views on the Gita and Non-violence:

> 'Self-realization and its means is the theme of the Gita, the fight between the two armies being but the occasion to expound the theme. You might if you like say that the poet himself was not against violence and hence he did not hesitate to press the occasion of war into service. But a reading of the Mahabharata has given me an altogether different impression. The poet Vyasa has demonstrated the futility of violence by means of that epic of wonderful beauty. What, he asks, if the Kauravas were vanquished? And what if the Pandavas won? How many were left of the victors and what was their lot? What an end Mother Kunti came to! And where are the Yadavas today?

'Where the description of the fight and justification of violence are not the subject matter of this epic it is quite wrong to emphasize these aspects. And if it is difficult to reconcile certain verses with the teaching of non-violence it is far more difficult to set the whole Gita in a framework of violence.

'The poet when he writes is not conscious of all the interpretations his composition is capable of. The beauty of poetry is that the creation transcends the poet. The truth that he teaches in the highest flights of his fancy is often not to be met with in his life. The life story of many a poet belies his poetry. That the central teaching of the Gita is not "*Himsā*" but "*Ahimsā*" is amply demonstrated by the subject begun in second chapter and summarized in the concluding eighteenth chapter. The treatment in the other chapters also supports the position. *Himsā* is impossible without attachment, without hatred, without anger and the Gita strives to carry us to a stage beyond *Satwa*, *Rājasa*, and *Tāmasa*, a state that excludes anger, hatred, etc. But I can even now picture to my mind Arjuna's eyes red with anger every time he drew the bow to the end of his ear.

'It was not in a spirit of *Ahimsā* that Arjuna refused to go to battle. He had fought many a battle before. Only this time he was overcome with false pity. He fought shy of killing his own kith and kin. Arjuna never discussed the problem of killing as such. He did not say that he would kill none, even if he regarded him as wicked. Shri Krishna knows everyone's innermost thoughts and he saw through the temporary infatuation of Arjuna. He therefore told him, "Thou hast already done the killing.

Thou cannot all at once argue thyself into non-violence. Finish what thou hast already begun." If a passenger going in the Scotch Express gets suddenly tired of travelling and jumps out of it he is guilty of suicide. He has not learnt the futility of travelling or travelling by a railway train. Similar was the case with Arjuna. Non-violent Krishna could give Arjuna no other kind of advice. But to say that the Gita teaches violence or justifies war because the advice to kill was given on a particular occasion is wrong.'

—*Mahatma Gandhi*
on the 'Teaching of the Gita'

APPENDIX A*

45. A COVENANT

The Jewish people consider themselves to be the 'chosen race' of God. The Old Testament is full of such beliefs. Even when Christ came, he was expected to restore the house of David. He was popularly known as the King of the Jews. Jesus himself never lent any support to such expectations beyond quoting the old prophets and extending their meaning and implications. Even now the Jews who are scattered all over the world still cling to the belief that somehow, some day, by some means God will gather them all and restore them to their sacred motherland, Jerusalem. What portions of the Holy Bible speak of this 'solemn covenant' between God and the Jewish race you must find out for yourself.

I am now going to draw your attention to quite a different sort of covenant altogether. I do not know if, even after it is pointed out, this new covenant will be accepted by all. Anyhow I claim to have discovered it. Anyone is at liberty to accept it or not. This covenant is not confined to any particular race, clime or country. It is not conditioned upon any one accepting a particular creed or so many articles of faith. It is no doubt declared by God and proclaimed as a covenant. Anyone who chooses to do so may participate and be benefited by it.

Verses XVIII—65, 66, I claim, constitute such a covenant. This is a glaring contrast to the Jewish conception of a 'chosen people' and a special covenant. God is not so partial, nor has He any race or country or

* These letters were added to clear some doubts raised by some students in the course of personal talks.

people of His own or chosen. Sri Ramakrishna objects to too much emphasis or praise of God's glories including mercy and might, etc. Too much attention on the glory or *aiśwarya* of God naturally induces a sense of fear and awe. It creates a gulf between man and God. When the mind is filled with His might, power, omniscience and other forms of glory, a sort of un-naturalness comes in and prevents us from regarding Him as one of us or as an object of love capable of the sweetest and most human relationship. By way of criticism of the attitude which speaks of God's mercy to the exclusion of other qualities, Sri Ramakrishna observes in a jocular vein, 'He is both father and mother of us all. If the parents are not to take care of their own children in their own homes, will the people of some other remote village come and attend to their needs?' Sri Ramakrishna's idea is very simple, natural, sweet, human and full of significance. He always regards himself as a child of the Divine Mother and considers that it is but natural for the mother to take care of her children. It is worthwhile to examine a bit more closely this motherhood of God. What does the ordinary mother do? She is full of care and solicitude for the baby. She does not even wait for the child to cry for food, but remembering its needs she attends to them all in every respect. This worldly mother's love and care is not altogether free from selfishness. But the Divine Mother is really more solicitous for the true welfare of all her children than even the natural mothers who bore them in their wombs.

If the Lord does anything for us even without our asking or seeking, it is all a one-sided affair. A covenant implies two parties. What is exactly our position or part of the contract? This is stated in the first half of verse 66 of chapter XVIII. We must surrender our will

and take shelter under the lotus feet of the Lord. On His part the Lord assures us that He frees us from all bondages and sins. For the implications of this act of surrender, please see letter No. 42.

The prominent feature in this covenant is its universality. Anyone belonging to any race or faith, worshipping Him in any manner, in any form or as a formless God, is fully entitled to all the benefits and privileges of this covenant. The only condition for the sharing of these privileges is that the beneficiary should not have even the least trace of clinging or counting upon, or looking up to any other possession or endeavour as a means for his salvation. The Lord and Lord alone must become the end as well as the means.

The sum and substance of the privileges that we derive from this covenant comes to this: We are freed from all bondages resulting from action (*karma*) of any kind. We have already seen how action of some kind or other is inevitable and unavoidable. (Compare III 5, 6; XVIII, 11.) Unless this activity is performed in a special manner bondage or *Karma bandham* is also inevitable. The covenant points out the way to break the fetters of this bondage. In the previous chapters the Lord has taught that *Yoga* or performing everything as sacrifice unto Him, or being an instrument (*nimitta mātram*) is just what is wanted on our part. All these are summarized and harmonized in the final exhortation: 'Take shelter in Me alone.' (*Māmekam śaraṇam vraja*).

46. GITA ESSENCE

Many people have attempted to describe this essence in many ways. Some say it is *Dwaita Vedanta*, others

Vishishtadwaita and so on. Some again speak of *Karmayoga* as its essence and others as *Bhakti* (Devotion), pure and simple. Not to speak of several other particular forms or theories. I have already indicated one or two in an earlier letter.

Some regard the last verse (XVIII – 78) as the Gita *Sāram*. The verse means that wherever the Supreme Lord as Sri Krishna in His Divine Aspect and Arjuna as His Human Counterpart or, in other words, as *Nara Nārāyaṇa* are worshipped, there all glory, success and happiness are bound to follow. Verse 66 of chapter XVIII (i. e. *Sarva dharmān* . . . .) is regarded by several others as the essence of the Gita. The elaborate and important doctrine of *Śaraṇāgata* has been evolved out of it. You must be familiar with Lokamanya Tilak's most learned and monumental work *Gita Rahasya* which regards '*Karmaṇyeva adhikāraste*' as the essence.

I confess it is impossible to dogmatise about the essence in any arbitrary fashion. Where the shoe pinches is best known only to the wearer. The Gita is primarily intended for Arjuna. Should we not therefore seek and find out if Arjuna himself has anything to say on this point? In answer to the query of the Lord stated in verse XVIII, 72, Arjuna declares in the following verse, 'All my delusions have been destroyed. I have understood everything in its true and right perspective by Thy grace. All doubts have vanished. I have become firmly resolved and willing to carry out Thy Commandments (as Thy instrument).' What is this command (*Vacanam*) of the Lord? In chapter XI the Lord after revealing to Arjuna His divine glorious form commands him in verse 33 'to be merely an agent or an instrument in his hands (*nimitta mātram bhava*)'. Arjuna replies, 'I will do thy bidding. 'He has attained to a state

of mind in which all individual wills are surrendered and a complete resignation to the Lord's will has become the normal condition. A similar phrase occurs in the Lord's prayer of the Christians and 'Thy will be done' is the most vital part of it.

If we are to get at the full and complete meaning and content of Arjuna's declaration, we must read and interpret this verse in the light of verses XVIII, 65-66. This verse (73) gives a complete definition of a true *śaraṇāgata*.

47. GO AHEAD

No one can teach or lay down definite rules as to what you should do. You live and gather experience and act according to your inner urge. In one word you must choose your own path. What matters is that you should go *on and on* to the final goal. Be on the alert not to get sidetracked nor enter a blind alley.

The Gita is a living and perennial fountain-head of inspiration, light and knowledge. As I read the verses daily new implications occur to my mind. Perhaps when you study the Gita more regularly and carefully, you yourself will light upon new meanings and implications. I have simply indicated in a very rough and imperfect manner what the teachings of the Gita mean to me. The great Acharyas and the scholars have interpreted the same teaching in their learned commentaries and colophons and have given their interpretations from their particular point of view. That there is no unanimity among all these teachings need not worry you. Considered from a mere intellectual point of view there is nothing but conflict or chaos. Taken as a guide to actual

ordering of our lives or as a *Sādhana* the goal reached must be the same. This goal may be (1) realizing the Absolute *Brahman*, or (2) the Sankhya *Kaivalya* state, or (3) *Bhakti* flowering into supreme devotion and absorption in God, or (4) *Saraṇāgata* or becoming an instrument in His hands (*nimitta mātram*). It does not matter in the least which particular path appeals to you. It depends purely on one's tastes and temperament. The important thing is the *achievement*.

Tṛyī Sānkhyam Yogah Paśupatimatam Vaishṇavamiti
Prabhinnai Prasthānai paramidamadah pathyamiti ca
Rucīnām vaitritryāddhajukutilanānāpathājushām
Nṛṇāmeko gamyastvamasi payasāmarṇava iva

'There are different paths (of realization) as enjoined by the three vedas, Sankhya, Yoga, Pasupata doctrine and Vaishnava Sastras. Persons following different paths, straight or crooked,—according as they consider this or that path as the best due to the differences in temperaments, all reach Thee alone just as all rivers finally enter the ocean.' (Siva Mahimma Stotram 7)

Yam Śaivā samupāsate Śiva iti Brahmeti Vedāntināh
Bauddhā Buddha iti pramāṇapatavah Karteti
Naiyāyikāh
Arhannityatha Jainaśasanastāh Karmeti Mīmāmsakāh
Soyam no Vidadhātu vāncitaphalam trailokyanātho
Harih

'He who is worshipped as Shiva by the Shaivaites, as Brahman by the Vedantins, as Buddha by the Buddhists, as Karta by the Naiyayikas (logicians) versed in reasoning, as the Arhat by those who are devoted to the teachings of Jivas, as Karma

by the Mimansakas—may that Hari, the Lord of the three worlds, fulfil our desires.'

In all these letters I have but one consideration, viz. how to apply the teaching of the Gita to our daily life and conduct and make our lives more purposeful, elevating and satisfactory in an abiding way. As I have hinted in the letter 'What is not in the Gita' any dogmatic assertion 'This and this alone is taught in the Gita' can never be my intention. If you are interested in any school or system of philosophy, there is plenty of scope and material throughout the Gita for that point of view as well. Similarly a *Bhakta* or a man of action can draw enough inspiration from it. Only do not commit the mistake which some moderns are guilty of, decrying *Sanyās* as anti-social and parasitical, or *Bhakti* as sentimental, weakening and effeminate. Go forward and stop not till you reach the highest. Recall the parable of the woodcutter frequently taught by Sri Ramakrishna.

Go *on and on*. I pray that you may get crowned with success. As I often write to you, '*Jaya Vijayee Bhava*'. I would make only one request to you and your fellow-students who may read these letters. I shall be thankful if it is pointed out to me by means of a question where further explanation is necessary or where the meaning is not clear. I shall try to answer them all to the best of my ability. I have found in the *Bhagavatam* almost every teaching of the Gita amplified and illustrated. I intended to select such parallels and give them as appendices to these letters. But as I find the parallelism is spread throughout the huge work, I intend, Lord willing, to write a series of letters on the *Bhagavatam* as a supplement to the Gita Letters.

48. THE GITA WAY

You express great surprise that during the last 1000 years and more so many eminent scholars and even sages should have missed the simple purport of the Gita. In my opinion it is the special motive and approach that is responsible. During the days of the revolutionary movement in Bengal a cartoon appeared in all the papers. After the poojah festivals a big cocoanut painted with red vermilion was found lying on the road. A police constable reported to his chief that he had discovered a live bomb. . A fleet of police cars were rushed to the spot along with camera-men and soldiers. Nobody dared to approach it. After the films in the camera had been exhausted, house searches were carried out extensively in the neighbourhood of the scene and every officer thought that he would get a promotion by making a big haul. But to their utter dismay and disappointment, a girl of five rushed to the spot crying that her goddess was thrown away, picked it up and disappeared into her house. It was an ordinary cocoanut of a big size. Although it was painted, the child had no terrors but the police had highly strung nerves in those days and could see nothing but bombs everywhere.

The learned commentators anxious and eager for finding support for their pet theories would not see simple things and simple meanings which you and I understand without difficulty. As I have pointed out elsewhere, it has turned out to be a most unfortunate event in the cultural history of India that this divine song should have been crowned as one of the 'Scriptural Trinity' or *Prasthāna Traya*. So the philosophers vie with one another in discovering all the problems of Metaphysics and their solutions in their own way according to their own light

and understanding. But you and I have no interest in proving or disproving any particular school of thought or system. As Sri Ramakrishna advises us, we have come to eat the mangoes. It is not necessary for us to know the name even of the variety. It is enough if we can taste and enjoy it. You should not understand me as discounting or disparaging in any way the splendid services which the eminent scholars have rendered to the cause of our Religion and Philosophy. Their contribution can be compared with advantage to any philosophy or speculation of other lands and ages.

You wish to avoid all philosophy. I also happen to possess no taste and interest in philosophy as such. Very often some of the classical and orthodox philosophical discussions strike me as profitless at the present day, more or less, even as husking the husk *Tushara ghatinam*, etc. or chewing the cud or *cūrṇita carvaṇam*. If our interest is mainly practical and to draw as much inspiration as possible from the Lord's teaching in the Gita we must apply our mind in all humility, sincerity, devotion, and faith and struggle ceaselessly and tirelessly to *live up* to the teaching. There is no possibility of failure in the ultimate sense of the term. Every outward failure should only provide fresh impetus to further struggle. There is no loss of effort. If the conservation of energy is true in the field of material sciences it is a hundred times more true in the spiritual domain. Recall the Lord's assurances in verses II, 40 and VI, 40.

I would suggest to you to collect all similar assurances in the Gita, meditate on them, and write an essay yourself bringing out all their implications. Similarly all the commandments in the Gita deserve our careful attention.

The central teaching of the Gita, *Yogī Bhava* looked at from a simple practical point of view comes to this:

'Break off all the fetters or bondages of *Karma*.' Whatever path of discipline or *sādhana* we may choose to adopt the end and aim must ultimately be to guard ourselves against being caught in the meshes of *Samsāra*. We should not get attached even in the remotest way to the fruits or consequences of action, which we are compelled by our very nature to perform till the end of our lives. The performance of action as such is neither good nor evil. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'In the light of the lamp one might read the Bhagavatam or forge a document. The lamplight is not to be blamed at all.' We become purified, ennobled and blessed by performing our duties as a *Yajña* or Sacrifice. Import into it personal satisfaction, ambition, feeling, etc., you drive nail after nail into your fetters. In the Lord's teaching, we find another variant of *Yogī Bhava—Karma bandham prahāsyasi*. It will be an interesting and very helpful exercise for you to find passages which emphasize the central teaching in the form of either *Yogī Bhava* or *Karma bandham prahāsyasi*. Almost every advice of the Lord to Arjuna comes to this point.

Your usual ultimate complaint or objection is, 'It is easier said than done.' There is no doubt about this. Life is living, learning, growing and experiencing. There cannot be any proxy in this game. As we must ourselves eat in order to satisfy our hunger, we have to live ourselves and ascend step by step patiently and perseveringly through all the rungs of the ladder of evolution. You must be willing to pay the due price. In these days of war and scarcity even very commonplace and paltry things have become ten times more costly than in normal days. In spiritual matters the modern mind obsessed or unbalanced with current and fashionable 'isms' of all sorts does not feel any need for

such a teaching and guidance as is contained in the Gita. The buyers are so very rare that once in a century among millions of people we come across a few real connoiseurs ready to pay any price for a well ordered spiritual struggle. There is no lack in the market of very cheap 'Japanese imitations'. You find cropping up every day all sorts of societies and Mandalis promising everything here and hereafter for no price. But the Lord, because He is the best and true friend of Arjuna and all humanity cannot promise any cheap indulgence, as so many self-elected vicegerents have been and are doing today. The lethargic nature of man has not failed to misinterpret the most sublime teaching '*Sarva dharmān parityajya*'. I believe among the Sri Vaishnavas there is a ceremony called *Bharanyāsa* whereby spiritual liberation is supposed to be obtainable. But it is not such a simple and cheap affair or to be done with, as some people imagine, in one ceremony. As has been pointed out before, the precious verse XVIII, 65, gives the true meaning of what '*śaraṇam vraja*' really means, '*manmanā bhava*', etc. Without mental reservation or allowing for any commission, discount or brokerage, we must practise cent per cent the devotional prerequisite '*manmanā bhava*'.

Another test is found in Arjuna's reply to the Lord's query (XVIII—72). Arjuna's answer contains the five essential and positive proofs of a *Śaraṇāgata*. *The first thing* is 'you must be completely cured of *delusion* or infatuation (*moha*). The root of this delusion is egoism viz. the belief that we are the agents or doers on our own account. As a matter of fact it is Nature or *Prakṛti* with its three *Guṇas* that is really responsible for the play of life activity. This false belief in the ego gives rise to all kinds of attachments and to the clinging to pleasure,

the anxiety to avoid pain, in short to everything that constitutes worldliness. This complete freedom from delusion is attained by *Smṛti*, the second aspect. The word literally means memory. Memory of what, we must ascertain. Philosophers will answer this in their own peculiar ways. We have to go by the Lord's own teachings in the Gita. In verse 61 the Lord teaches in a most categorical and unmistakable manner that we are but a machine while He is the operator thereof. This very idea has been previously clarified and explained even to the very minutest detail. (See notes to verses 12-17 of XVII.)

The third and fourth points in Arjuna's reply are *'sthitosmi'* and *gata sandehah*. Both positively and negatively or, in the words of the logicians, by the method of agreement and difference Arjuna affirms the essence of his mental outlook. He is convinced that he is but an instrument or *nimitta mātram*. All doubts regarding this position have been banished for ever. I feel that we must have faith of some kind. But this faith is nullified or at least not sufficiently active to the extent of influencing our action chiefly because doubts crop up in us unawares. The moment even a shadow of doubt falls on this faith we are landed in a quagmire. Notice that the final and the fifth aspect in the declaration of Arjuna is *'karishye vacanam tava'*, 'I shall do Thy bidding'. I have said enough on various occasions how very difficult is a perfect fulfilment of this condition. A very interesting story of a Christian Saint, Father Suso, of the medieval ages comes to my mind. I would advise you to read it for yourself.

The essence of this verse (XVIII, 72) is in *Twatprasādāt* (by Thy grace). Except through His grace, it is almost impossible to attain this perfect surrender by our own efforts. This point summarizes and harmonizes all the

various forces in which the central teaching of the Gita has been expressed. We must act so long as we live in this world. There is no way of escaping this. We cannot always act wisely or foolishly. The latter is the egoistic way of clinging to fruits leading to bondages of every kind. The other alternative is to dedicate our whole life as a sacrifice or worship of the Lord that is immanent in humanity. Infinite patience and the resolution never to accept defeat or failure are the two essential requisites. Whether your friends believe in any form of religion or accept any system of philosophy is wholly irrelevant. They may not even care for the Gita. If you are to make the best of the precious privilege of the human birth, the life according to the Gita way is the supreme duty. That alone will give you freedom and happiness.

Lord bless you. May you become a Yogi and be crowned with success. *'Jaya Vijayee Bhava.'*

49. THE NEW S. S. L. C.

Often a person who has attained eminence in some field of thought or department of life is accepted as an authority in every subject. This is what psychologists call *prestige suggestion.* An eminent judge may not be well posted in the economic problems of the day or the technique of gardening. Yet he is invited to preside over bank anniversaries and horticultural exhibitions and his observations, by no means well informed, are accepted and quoted as authority. The person himself comes to believe that he can talk authoritatively on any subject under the sun.

Somewhat in this fashion University students and graduates estimate their ability and understanding on a

very generous and liberal scale and fall into the same error. You must guard yourself against this very natural weakness. You read poetry and Shakespeare. You are asked to criticize Shakespeare's thought and art. Sometimes young students strike upon original points of view and criticism. But the Gita is not mere poetry or drama. Not even cleverness or brilliancy of intellect will be very helpful in your entering into the right spirit of the Gita. What is wanted is a fund of real humanity. If this humanity is developed, it is the same as Realization of God or the goal of all spiritual life and endeavour.

I am fond of saying that there is a simple entrance examination to this broad university which every candidate to humanity must pass. One may be a double or triple M.A., but may not be able to score even one per cent of the marks in this S. S. L. C. examination. This S. S. L. C., stands for *Sympathy, Service, Love and Co-operation.* Only to the extent that a person possesses these four, could he be adjudged to be a true human being. These four are simple things. We write 'With love, etc.' in letters. We extend sympathy to many. We join service leagues and we become members of co-operative societies. The real practice and applications of these four covers a very wide field.

I have a vivid instance of the widest disparity in outwardly similar human beings. Some university students were walking along a bridge. It was a moonlit night and they were more or less absorbed in themselves and in their chit-chat. All on a sudden from the opposite side a man jumped into the river, obviously to commit suicide. Except one student, the remaining went on discussing the pros and cons of what could be and ought to be done. The other did not bother as to what would happen to his wrist watch, or new shirt, whether he would catch

cold by becoming wet and so on but straightway jumped into the water to rescue the suicide. Fortunately he did save the man. Some of the other students not only failed to judge correctly the motive of the brave soul but did not scruple to pass adverse criticism that 'It was a foolhardy act.' 'It was a display of bravado' and so on. Here is a typical instance of candidates getting varying marks in this new S. S. L. C.

You have heard of or perhaps witnessed the Kundu incident, and seen the memorial in Calcutta. Years ago in the municipal sewage man-hole several workmen entered to clean the drain, as part of their daily duty. One, two, three, four people entered one after the other on finding that the former one did not come up. As none of the four came out, a small crowd collected round the man-hole and began to shout. But nothing was done. This brave Kundu who was passing along, heard the story and jumped into the hole and one by one brought the suffocated workmen to the street but himself being suffocated by the poison gas died a martyr. If you have not visited this place, I would suggest that you should see it the next time you go to Calcutta. Whom will you judge as a real human being, the brave Kundu who had no university degrees or decorations or several others who were superior to him in many respects according to the common standards but failed miserably according to our new S. S. L. C. requirements?

This sympathy is like a seed planted in every human breast; but if it is cultivated, manured, watered and looked after, it would blossom into a fine tree and bring forth fragrant flowers and even bear delicious fruits. Practical and living sympathy is what is required. Mere sentimental effusion or shedding of tears and uttering of helpless cries, etc. won't do; this is not the real and true

coin of sympathy. Sympathy must express itself in service suited to the occasion and both these are possible if the greatest of all things in the world 'LOVE' is allowed full play and freedom. The tragedy of tragedies is that this love which is God is cribbed, cabined and confined by all sorts of unnatural and diabolical restrictions such as caste, class, society, status, relations, etc. If love is true, it knows no barrier or limitations. When true love grows in volume and intensity by often expressing itself in true sympathy and service you will find true cooperation is not only possible but becomes natural. We Indians need more than other nations to pass and become successful, everyone of us, in this S. S. L. C. Then communal, and provincial squabbles and clashes which besmear the face of our public life will vanish for good.

The Gita way of life and conduct can be understood only if we pass this test and enter as students in this new university (humanity). Whatever be the philosophic terms used in the Gita, whatever the paths of discipline or *sādhana* detailed in the various chapters, you will find that the new S. S. L. C. is the essence of all the teachings.

50. CONCLUSION

It is a marvel as to how these letters came to be written. There is a sincere feeling in me that both I and the kind friend who took these down as they were dictated have attempted to be mere instruments in His hands. Perhaps it is also partly due to your good luck.

The university atmosphere of today is surcharged with Communism, Bolshevism and Socialism. Many youths would not even open anything smelling of

Religion. Yet these letters are primarily intended and addressed to you and your fellow-students in the University. In a former letter I have referred to your Modern Trinity in Sports, Science and Socialism. I have thrown enough hints that the Gita does not look upon these three with any disfavour. On the other hand I claim that the Gita fully accommodates and might be interpreted as preaching this very trinity, perhaps in a superior and truer light. The Lord Sri Krishna is a sportsman *par excellence*. His true scientific outlook is most patent in his categorical declaration in verse XVIII, 63. It runs thus, 'Thus has wisdom more secret than all secrets been declared to thee by Me. Consider it fully (all the pros and cons in a truly scientific spirit) and feel at perfect liberty to do as it pleases you.'

Now what about communism? In my opinion there is cent per cent of this in the Gita. The Lord says in III, 12, 13, '....He is verily a thief who enjoys the things they (Devas) give without giving them anything in return. .... But the wicked who prepare food for their own sake—verily they eat sin.'

Make due allowance for the distant age in which the Gita was spoken and take the true import and spirit of sin, devas, sacrifice (*pāpa, deva, yajña*). You get with an astonishing accuracy your modern slogans, 'All private property is theft,' 'No one shall have cake until all have bread.' If I may venture to say so, these two slogans echo but feebly and faintly the Gita communism.

Please note that the communism of the Gita knows no such thing as a class war. For the Gita classes and masses as separate entities can have no meaning or even existence. It cannot therefore tolerate any hatred, violence and massacre of the classes or the exploiters, even

though it be in the name of the familiar slogan, 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity,' or any other intended to promote the welfare and the happiness of the masses. The most cardinal teaching of the Gita is non-violence in the highest and truest sense of the term. *Ahimsā* as *Paramo dharma* cannot be merely a negative concept. It is nothing but pure and unconditional love. According to Gita, hatred and violence breed more hatred and more violence. The entire history of humanity up to date emphasizes eloquently this very sad and tragic truth.

Please notice the verses which I select at random. *Kāma esha, Krodha esha,* III, 37, *Kāma krodha, tathā lobha .... trayam tyajet* XVI, 21. There is no mistaking this truth that lust, anger, etc. are our worst enemies. As the Gita puts it very poetically, these are the veritable gateways to hell. For the positive aspect of this very teaching notice just the following verses which come to my mind most casually. *Panditā Samadarśinah,* V, 18. *Nirvairah sarvabhuteshu,* XII, 4. *Yo mām paśyati sarvatra Sarvaca Mayipaśyati.* VI, 30. *Samadarśinah* and *Sarva bhuta hiteratah* (looked with an equal eye and engaged in the welfare of all beings) occur very frequently in the Gita.

How then can a Gita communist be a party to the cruelty, injustice and violence perpetrated against these so-called exploiters? It may be objected that the privileged classes can never be expected to surrender voluntarily the power and pelf which they have stolen from the masses even though we might quote a hundred Gitas. One might sooner expect the hungry wolf or the ferocious tiger to become considerate and merciful to the victims. The most charitable-minded critic will say that it is all a vain dream or Utopia. For thousands of years humanity have pursued the path of violence and hatred.

We have come to the most intolerable state in which we find the world to be just now. It may take a thousand years or even ten thousand for the Gita communism to become an actuality. Yet it is a noble ideal worth living for and dying for even. In my humble opinion there is no middle position or half-way house. We must fill our forms as candidates for humanity. Practise day and night ceaselessly, Sympathy, Service, Love and Co-operation. The aim we have been pursuing leads nowhere but to an unmitigated hell. Let us try the Gita way, the only route to Heaven.

I wish your communist 'varsity fellows will take up my challenge and pick holes if they can in this grand teaching of the Gita full of humanity. Instead of running to Russia and becoming slavish imitators, let them study and practise their modern Trinity as taught in the Gita. It is no blame to the Gita if it has not been practised so far. It is up to these critics to fill up the gap. Only they must eschew all insolence and impatience in the mistaken zeal for reform. If you but understand, believe and practise to the best of your ability this noble Gita communism, you will be rendering to humanity more solid and substantial service than a million Marx's and Lenins. All honour and glory to them. My view is that they can never become a model for us to follow or even for humanity at large. The Gita communism exhorts all to lead their lives and discharge their duties as a veritable sacrifice and worship, in one word to bring out in all its glory and perfection the inherent divinity in all men. Another point which I adverted to in my first letter is that you should take these letters as my private and individual opinions to be judged on their merits in a scientific spirit. No prejudice must be allowed to bias your mind.

One word more. Sri Ramakrishna's teachings have been quoted and referred to very often. I make no apology for this. I have confessed that Sri Ramakrishna is my only Light in understanding every problem of life. For more than twenty-five years I have been studying the Gita daily and I feel convinced that Sri Ramakrishna is the Gitacharya for this age. I must mention that I consider Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ and all other world teachers as Gitacharyas of their age and clime.

May the grace and blessings of all these world teachers ever attend you and all the readers shall be my constant and fervent prayer.

OM Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.

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GLOSSARY

Abhisekham— Ceremonial bath.

Acharya— Preceptor.

Adwaita— Hindu philosophy of non-dualism.

Ahimsa— Non-violence.

Ajamila— A mythological character of the Hindu scriptures.

Anandamoyee— A well known spiritual personality.

Ananya-Bhakti—Right-minded devotion.

Anityam— Ephemeral.

Arya Samaj— Hindu reformist movement founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswathi in the latter half of the nineteenth century with a view to re-establish Hinduism on its Vedic basis and to rid it of idolatry, etc.

Arjuna— One of the five Pandava princes to whom Lord Krishna expounded the discourse, Bhagavadgita, on the battle-field of Kurukshetra.

Asoka— Mauryan King of India of the third century B.C.

Asukham— Unhappy.

Asurik— Demonical.

Asram — Home for propagating spiritual teaching; also a stage of life.

Avatar— Incarnation.

Benares— Holy city of the Hindus in the United Provinces; also called Kasi.

Bhagavan— God.

Bhagavatam— Hindu scripture narrating the early life and youthful exploits of Sri Krishna.

Its authorship is traditionally attributed to Vyasa, the author of the epic *Mahabharata*.

Bhakta— Devotee.

Bhakti— Devotion.

Bhishma— First commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army in the Mahabharata War.

Bhoga— Enjoyment.

Brahma— Hindu name of God the Creator.

Buddha— 'The Enlightened One'; The Sakya prince (about 566-486 B.C.) who renounced worldly happiness and later became the founder of a religion—Buddhism, which may be regarded as a branch of Hinduism. His original name was Gautama. Also known as Siddharta, Sakyamuni, etc.

Chaitanya— A fifteenth century Bengali reformer who is regarded as an incarnation of Sri Krishna. Also known as Gauranga.

Christ— 'The Anointed One', i.e. one who was sent by God with a holy purpose. Jesus Christ founded the religion called after his name—Christianity (First century A.D.)

Dakshineswar— The place near Calcutta where the famous Kali temple is situated. Sri Ramakrishna lived here for many years.

Damayanti— Name of heroine in one of the moral stories in the Mahabharata.

Dharma— Law of one's being; righteousness.

Dhritarashtra— Blind king of the Lunar Race, father of the Kauravas (See 'Mahabharata).

Dhruva— Hero of one of the moral stories in the Mahabharata.

Dhyana— Meditation.

Draupadi— Wife of the Pandava princes.

Drona— Brahmin preceptor of the Pandava and Kaurava princes.

Duryodhana— Name of Kaurava prince.

Dwaita— Hindu philosophy of dualism.

Ekasloki Ramayana—Ramayana in one verse.

Guru— Perceptor.

Iswara— Lord; also name of God Siva.

Japa— Meditation.

Janaka— King of Mithila, father of Sita, the heroine of the epic *Ramayana*.

Jnana— Knowledge.

Kamandala— Receptacle for carrying water.

Karma— Work; action.

Krodha— Anger.

Kshatriya— Member of the second (warrior) class among Hindus.

Kurukshetra— The field where the Mahabharata war was fought.

Mahabharata— Hindu epic describing the Great War on the field of Kurukshetra between the Kauravas and the Pandavas both of whom claimed the throne of Hastinapur (Delhi). Said to be the biggest of the epics of the world containing about 1,00,000 verses. Originally written by Vyasa, the compiler of the Vedas, but it is said that many others have added verses to it and thus it grew to its present length through centuries. The Bhagavadgita

is a part of this epic. It also contains many other discourses and moral stories such as those of Nala and Damayanti, Satyavan and Savitri, Dhruva, Prahlada, etc. It is often called the Fifth Veda.

Manu— Ancient Hindu law-giver.

Mat parah— Wholly devoted to me (the Lord).

Maya— Illusion.

Naraka— Hell.

Narayana— Name of Hindu God.

Nirvana— Liberation.

Padmapurana— A Hindu scripture.

Pandit— Scholar

Parayanam— Scriptural reading.

Patanjali— Ancient Hindu philosopher who worked up the Yoga philosophy on the basis of the teachings of the Upanishads.

Prakrti— Nature.

Prana— Life.

Pujah— Worship.

Purusha— Man.

Ramayana— Hindu epic written by Valmiki, the first Sanskrit poet, describing the destruction of Ravana the demon-king of Lanka (Ceylon) who had abducted Sita, wife of Rama, prince of Ayodhya, when the prince was wandering in the forests in order to fulfil a promise made by his father.

Sadhana— Discipline.

Sadhu— Virtuous person.

Saivaite— Follower of a sect which considers Siva as the Supreme God.

Sakti Devata — Goddess of Power.

Samadhi— State of unconsciousness of outward things of a meditating person; superconscious state.

Samsara— Worldly entanglement.

Sanatana Dharma—Vedic religion.

Satya— Truth.

Savitri— Heroine of one of the moral stories in the *Mahabharata*.

Sita — Wife of Rama, hero of the epic *Ramayana*.

Siva— Hindu name of God the Destroyer.

Sivaji— Maratha king of the seventeenth century A.D.

Sri Krishna— Hero of the epic *Mahabharata*, who is considered by the Hindus as the incarnation of God born in human form to establish righteousness upon the earth. (See also 'Bhagavatam.')

Sri Ramakrishna—Bengali saint (1836-1886 A.D.) who taught the oneness of the Godhead and the basic harmony of all religions. His disciples and followers are carrying on his teachings under the order named after him with centres all over the world. Swami Vivekananda was one of his disciples and was a vigorous exponent of his teachings.

Sri Sankara— Hindu philosopher of the eighth century who established a system of philosophy known as Advaita.

Swadharma — One's own religion.

Swami Vivekananda—Direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who carried the message of his

Master to America and preached about the basic harmony of all religions and expounded the Vedanta philosophy. His original name was Naren.

Swarga— Heaven.

Talyarkhan— The great Indian sports-commentator of Bombay.

Upanishads— Final sections of the Vedas giving the inner meanings of sacrifices and rituals and revealing most profound spiritual truths. The philosophy that they embody is known as Vedanta philosophy.

Vaishnavas— A sect of Hindus who worship Vishnu as the supreme God.

Valmiki— First Sanskrit poet, author of the epic *Ramayana*.

Varahapurana— A Hindu scripture.

Varnasrama— Four-fold division of Hindu society.

Vedas— The primary scriptures of the Hindus. The word 'Veda' comes from the Sanskrit root *vid* (to know). The Vedas contain the teachings of a great number of Rishis to whom God revealed Himself and thus help us to know God. There are four Vedas—the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Atharvana Veda.

Veera Swargam— Heaven of heroes.

Vibhuti— Glory.

Vidya— Knowledge.

Vishnu— Hindu name of God the Protector.

Visvarupa Darsana— Vision of the universal form.

Yogasastra— Science of Yoga.

Yogeswara— Lord of Yoga.

INDEX

A

Absolute, the, 24, 73
Acharya, 1 (See also, 'Teacher')
Action, bondage of, 75, 88, 96, 112, 117, 122, 149, 178
  fruits of, 30, 68*ff.*, 75, 80*ff.*, 96, 98, 111, 119, 146, 149, 158*ff.*
  —and inaction, 112*ff.*, 119, 160
Adwaita, 27, 34, 90
Ahimsā, 48
Ajamila, 134
Aldous Huxley, 109
All-India Radio, 19
Allopaths, 31
Ananya bhakti, 135*ff.*
Anandamoyee, 24
Anasakti Yoga, 47, 85, 106
Anganyāsa, 5
Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 2
Anityam asukham lokam, 139, 169
Annamalai University, 1
Arjuna, eternal aspect of, 21
  eagerness for truth in, 26
  the typical man, 46, 91, 170-71
  and the fight, 50*ff.*, 57*ff.*, 170*ff.*
  his dilemma, 62, 117-18, 139
  and sin, 71, 162
  and the bonds of action, 73
  and three gunas, 79
  and Viswarupa, 142*ff.*, 166
Arnold, Sir Edwin, 154
Arudra darsan, 31
Arya Samajist, 31, 34
Asoka, 66
Asura sampat, 155
Asurik qualities, 48
Atman, nature of, 63*ff.*, 74, 86, 174
  body and—, 64, 101
  of Yogis, 132
Attainment, 73-4, 124, 134, 150, 167
Aurobindo Ghosh, Sri 152
Avatār, 24, 102*ff.*, 136
Avatāra vāda, 102*ff.*, 136*ff.*
Ayurveda, 31

B

Bhagavadgita, 18, 40, 44, 48, 90, 108, 144
Bhagavan, 5, 6, (See also, 'Sri Krishna')
Bhagavatam, 5, 6, 29, 32, 39, 55, 148
Bhakta, 5, 6, 145
Bhakti, 74, 77, 87, 89, 129, 140, 145
Bharata, 87
Bhishma, 49, 51, 60, 107, 135, 144
Bhoga, 76
Bible, 31

Bijam, 5
Brahma, 11
Brahman, 24, 39
Brahma Sutras, 90
Brahma Vidya, 98
Brahmacharya, 29-30
Brapanna Gita, 26
Buddha, Lord, 20, 31, 66, 71, 77, 109, 124, 139
Buddhism, 34, 91, 109, 127, 174
Burbank, Dr, 38

C

Caraṇasmṛti, 134
Caste system, 111, 163*ff.*
Chaitanya cult, 24
Chaitanya Deva, 32-3
Chandi, 5
Chidambaram, 1, 31
Christ, Jesus, 21, 31*ff.*, 41, 65, 66, 109, 123
Christian, 31, 34, 36, 109, 174
Churchill, 155
Contra-suggestibility, 16
Control of senses, 100, 116, 122, 125, 136, 142, 165
Cosmic biology, 3
Crown of Wild Olive, 80
Culture, 90-91 (See also 'Hindu')

D

Daivīsampat, 146
Daivik qualities, 48, 130
DakshinamoorthyStotra, 25
Dakshineswar, 4
DakshoPrajapatiEpisode, 77
Damayanti, 18
Devotee, 136*ff.*, 145*ff.*, 168*ff.* (See also 'Bhakti')
Desire, 122*ff.*, 131, 136, 165, 168
Dharma, 6, 47, 48, 53, 54, 66, 82, 104, 107, 111, 122, 168, 172 (See also 'Duty')
Dhritarashtra, 18, 19, 143
Dhruva, 148
Dhyana, 5, 136
Divine Mother, 30, 32, 46, 89, 103
Draupadi, 18, 108
Drona, 51, 60, 144
Dualities, 64, 70*ff.*, 78, 96, 149
Duryodhana, 60, 108
Duty, 7, 55, 82, 92, 94, 98, 114, 122, 168
Dwaita, 34

E

Ekasloki Ramayanam, 39
Emotion, 64, 75, 87
Esoteric Psychology, 3
Eternal aspect, 21
Exhibitionism, 16

F

Faith, 5, 6, 25, 98, 116, 170 (See also 'Devotee')
Free Will *vs.* Determinism, 37
Fruits of Action, (See 'Action')

G

Gandhi, Mahatma, 47, 85, 88, 91, 105-6
Gautama, the Sakyamuni, 20
Gita, (See also 'Bhagavad-gita')
how to study, 1*ff.*, 4, 30*ff.*
commentaries on, 2, 7, 27*ff.*
interpretations of, 3, 47, 50
approaches to, 3*ff.*, 15*ff.*, 30*ff.*
utterance of the Lord, 4, 19, 40
the image of God, 4
the central teaching of, 8, 27*ff.*, 39, 45*ff.*, 77, 80, 85, 90, 100, 112, 114, 117, 120, 127, 132, 145, 153, 171, 180
and scoffers, 14*ff.*, 117
(See also 'Moderns')
and the War, 8, 65, 67
the fifth Veda, 18
controversies regarding—, 19*ff.*, 48
Sri Ramakrishna on its teaching, 27
why study—, 35*ff.*
about its length, 39*ff.*
is not a text-book, 39, 48, 86
repetitions in—, 40*ff.*, 114, 120
a gospel of harmony, 31*ff.*, 41, 65, 75, 91, 139, 145*ff.*
and Yoga practice, 45-6
Gandhiji's interpretation of, 48, 85, 90
Sri Sankaracharya's commentary of, 49
its simplicity, 48-9
its main problem, 51*ff.*, 170
on action, 70*ff.*
and Sankhya view, 73, 97*ff.*
and Vedavāda, 76*ff.*
on the perfect man, (See '*Sthitaprajña*')
one of Prasthāna Trayas, 90
on ritualism, 93, 100, 130
on caste system, 111-12
on the goal of life, 135
on *Sanyāsa*, 159*ff.*
commandments, 175*ff.*
Gita-saptasloki, 39
God, realization of, 4, 108, 126, 132, 140, 174*ff.*, (See also 'attainment')
student's belief in, 9*ff.*, 13*ff.*
need for—, 13, 111
and guru, 23-4
advent of, 102*ff.*
devotion to, 119*ff.*, 128, 131*ff.*, 136*ff.*, 152, 167*ff.*
and the Universe, 128*ff.*, 136*ff.*, 141, 148*ff.*, 153

God, glory of, 140*ff.*, 175
Guṇas, three, 74, 78*ff.*, 97, 148*ff.*, 157*ff.*
Guṇātita, 146, 151 (See also 'perfect man')
Guru, 22*ff.*, 114*ff.*

H

Hindu,
culture, 23, 36, 127
ideal of widowhood, 30
theory of Karma, 36
scriptures, 105
view of avatar, 104*ff.*
Hiranya, 155
Hitler, 155
Homeopaths, 31
Hṛidayanyāsa, 5

I

I desire no victory, 51*ff.*
'I,' notion of, 162
Iago, 155
Ikshavaku, 102
Inaction, 80
Initiation, 22
Intellect, 6-7
Intuition, 6
Ishṭam, 110
Iswara, 74

J

Jainism, 91, 127, 174
Janaka, 95-6, 177
Jātismaratva, 105
Jñāna, 74, 77-9, 88, 95, 98, 114*ff.*, 140, 150
Julius Caesar, 50, 51

K

Kaivalya, 175
Kālo asmi, 144
Kāmini-kancana, 12, 156
Kāmya, 78
Kapilavasthu, 20
Karanyāsa, 5
Karma, law of, 36, 78, 127, 160
bonds of, 73, 80, 84-5, 99, 116, 151
yoga, 74, 88, 138, 140
and rebirth, 106, 113, 132, 151
nishkāma, 138
Karmakānda, 78
Kauravas, 18*ff.*, 48
Kaviraja, 31
Kingdom of Heaven, 65, 95, 123, 175
Krishna, utterances of, 44
cult of, 33
immortality of, 66 (See also, 'Sri Krishna')
Kshatriya, 66, 67
Kshetra, 48
Kurukshetra, 18, 20

L

Last moments of Life, 132*ff.*
Law of causation, 82
Leelaprasanga, 104
Leninism, 155

Life of Sri Ramakrishna, 59
Lotus Feet of the Lord, 12, 31, 61, 102, 128, 140, 153, 156, 159, 166, 168, 178

M

Magna Carta of Liberation, 167
Mahabharata, 18, 48, 95, 135
Mahanirvāna Tantra, 24
Mahatma Gandhi, (See 'Gandhi')
Manu, 102
Māyā, 128, 162, 166
Metaphysics, 3, 4, 8
Milton, 123
'Mind is everything', 28, 82*ff.*, 92, 97, 100, 122, 145, 174
Moderns, 9*ff.*, 13*ff.*, 83, 94, 95, 98, 101, 103, 111, 152, 155, 160
Moksha, 27, 48, 135
Mundakopanishad, 26
Muslim, 31, 34, 110, 174

N

Naimittika, 78, 166
Naren, 23, 59, 143 (See also 'Swami Vivekananda')
Nataraja, 1
National Front, the, 67
Nirvāna, 34
Nirvikalpa state, 59, 175
Nistraigunyo bhava, 79, 149
Nitya, 78

P

Pandavas, 18, 19, 48
Parvati, 137
Patanjali, 105, 125
Pauranic cult, 24
Perfect man, 45, 85, 146, 149, 153-4, 165
  mind, 69
  teacher, 70, 73, 98, 139
  wisdom, 96
Philosophy, true, 3, 8
  popular 65
Prakṛti, 78*ff.*, 97, 106-7, 131, 136, 148*ff.*, 157*ff.*, 162*ff.*
Prapatti, 168
Prasthāna trayas, 90, 91
President Garfield, 40-41
Puranas, 24, 156-7
Purusha, 148*ff.*
Purushottama, 152*ff.*

R

Rājasa, 99, 136, 157, 163
Rājavidya, 136
Rama, 66
Ramakrishna, Sri,
  his life and sayings, 2, 3, 87, 104
  on intellectuals, 8, 12
  on God, 12-13, 75, 79, 108, 121, 138, 141
  on profession and practice, 14, 29, 98

Ramakrishna, Sri,
his commentary of the Gita, 27, 43, 171
and Brahmacharya, 30
religion of, 31-32, 174
on Karma, 37
on the goal of life, 38-9, 74-5, 119, 169
on repetitions in the Gita, 43
on the essence of Yoga, 46
his description of the world, 53, 156
on duty, 59, 156, 158
on the vision of God, 74, 126, 138, 141
on mental training, 101, 126, 128, 174
on incarnation, 103-4
on previous births, 105
and 'inaction', 112*ff.*
on faith, 116
and supernormal powers, 143-4
on Bhakti, 145
and self-surrender, 173
Ramana Maharishi, 88
Ramdas, Swami, 88
Ramarajya, 95
Ramayana, 18, 39, 55, 95
Reason, 6, 24
Realities of life, 70
Realization, 65, 72-3, 77, 124, 129, 148, 174
Rebirth, 127, 132*ff.*, 137, 153
'Rebuttal of a Dilemma', 57
Religion, True, 3, 13
students' belief in, 9*ff.*
and practical affairs, 27
and Adwaita, 90
and worship, 110, 130
Religious, art, 1-2
ideas, 5
susceptibilities, 31
feuds, 112
founders, 139
Renunciation, 27*ff.*, 125, 160*ff.*
Romain Rolland, 59
Roosevelt, 155
Ruskin, 80

S

Sacrifice, 114, 131, 137, 158
Sādhaka, 30, 126
Sādhana, 22, 29, 42, 73, 74, 99, 121*ff.*, 145*ff.*, 169, 173
Sakti Devata, 5
Sakta cult, 24, 31
Saivaite, 31, 152
Salvation, 168*ff.*
Samādhi, 112, 174
Samsāra, 45, 73, 92, 99, 136, 145, 152, 154*ff.*, 159, 163
Samskāras, 83, 164
Sanatana Dharma, 53, 91
Sanjaya, 18, 19, 143
Sānkhya view, 72-3, 76, 97, 105, 119, 148*ff.*, 157*ff.*, 162, 175
Sanyās, 30, 118, 121, 138, 159*ff.*
Sarada Devi, 74

Śaraṇāgata, 153, 172*ff.*
Sātwik, 136, 146, 151, 157, 161, 163
Savitri, 18
Scandinavian Sagas, 2
Science, 3, 11, 15, 33, 167
Seer, 147*ff.*
Selfishness, 6
Self-surrender, 168*ff.*, 172*ff.*
Sermon on the Mount, 65
Seva of Jiva, 158
Shad-ripu, 7
Siddhānta, 74
Siddhi, 44, 74
Simhagad, 52
Sin, 52*ff.*, 70, 71, 93, 99, 162, 168
Sita, 18, 95
Siva, 1, 11, 23
Sivaji, 52, 66
Socialism, 11, 53, 93-4, 165
Society, 53-4
Song Celestial, 75-6, 154
Spiritual Chemistry, 3
  truths, 24, 25
Sports, 11, 15
Śraddhā, 146, 157
Sri Krishna, 19
  utterances of, 4
  eternal aspect of, 21
  the true friend, 26, 102, 166
  the ideal teacher, 26
  the Lord of Yoga, 46
  on Arjuna's fears, 55
  on Himself, 96, 103*ff.*, 112, 140
Sri Sankara, 25, 90-91
Sridharaswami, 32-3
St. Christopher, 60
Stalin, 155
Sthitaprajña, 85, 120, 146
Students
  and religion, 9*ff.*
  and God, 9*ff.*, 16*ff.*
  and their environment, 17
  and rural life, 18 (See also 'Moderns')
Sudra, 164
Sukadeva, 95
Supramental Reality, 3
Supreme Brahman, 23
Swami Prabhavananda, 109
Swami Saradananda, 104
Swami Shivananda, 59
Swami Vivekananda
  on God, 9, 104
  on Karma theory, 36
  on social reform, 53, 112
  his *Rajayoga*, 101, 123
  on devotion, 131
  and supernormal powers, 143-4
  on the message of the Gita, 176

T

Talyarkhan, 19
Tamāsha, 136, 157, 163
Tantras, 5, 24, 101
Tapas, 42, 157
Teacher and disciple, 22, 63
Tennyson, 122
Tevaram, 171
Text-torturing, 7

Thanaji, 52
The Man Nobody Knows, 40
The Training of the Human Plant, 38
Thou should not grieve, 63*ff.*
Three *guṇas*, 78*ff.*, 163
Traiguṇya vishayā Vedā, 78
Trinity, Modern, 11, 53
Truth, 3, 7
Tyāga, 27*ff.*, 159*ff.*, 171

U

Uddhava, 29
Upadeśam, 22
Upanishads, 20, 22, 26, 90, 176
Uttarayana, 135

V

Vairāgya, 125
Vaishnava cult, 24, 31, 134, 152, 168
Varṇāśrama, 111
Vedanta, 63, 73, 90, 105, 150, 173
Vedavāda, 75*ff.*
  the controversial point in, 75
  implications of, 76, 77
  limit of, 78
  and the three categories of rituals, 78
  and the need for God, 111
Vedic tradition, 91
  rituals, 93
Veera Swargam, 67
Vibhūti, 108, 129, 141
Vijñāna, 98, 175
Vishishtadwaita, 34
Vishnu, 11
Viśvarupa, 108, 129, 142, 148
Vivaswan, 102
Vyasa, 19, 95

W

War and the Gita, 8, 65, 67
Wisdom, 114*ff.*
Woodroffe, Sir John, 24, 101
World War, 65
Worldliness, 12, 27*ff.*, 45, 85, 114, 120, 139, 168
Worship, 1, 4, 10, 42, 110, 114, 129*ff.*, 152, 167

Y

Yajnavalkya, 95
Yajña, 42, 92, 94, 114, 157
Yo yo yam, 130*ff.*
Yoga, 43*ff.*, 102
  popular idea of, 42-3
  the way of—, 45
  view of life, 73, 76, 119, 122
  Karma—, 74
  Jñāna—, 74
  Bhakti—, 74
  essence of, 83-4, 98, 113
  excellence of, 84, 127
  is dexterity in action, 84, 88, 117, 178

Yoga, requisites of true—, 86, 116, 121 *ff.*, 128, 131, 178
technique of, 121
and *sanyāsa*, 121
Hatha—, 124
and rebirth, 132
Yogaśāstra, 46, 98
Yogastha, 83
Yoga sutra, 105, 125, 168
Yogavaśishṭa, 95
Yogayukta, 135
Yogeśwara, 46, 171
Yogi, false notions about, 44
types of, 45
characteristics of, 46, 119, 146, 157, 162 *ff.*
how to become a, 73-4
passing away of, 132 *ff.*
Yogī bhava, 39, 43 *ff*, 72, 83, 94, 101, 117, 127, 145 *ff.*, 153, 160, 166, 173, 178, 180
Yogic culture, 101
vision, 142

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